

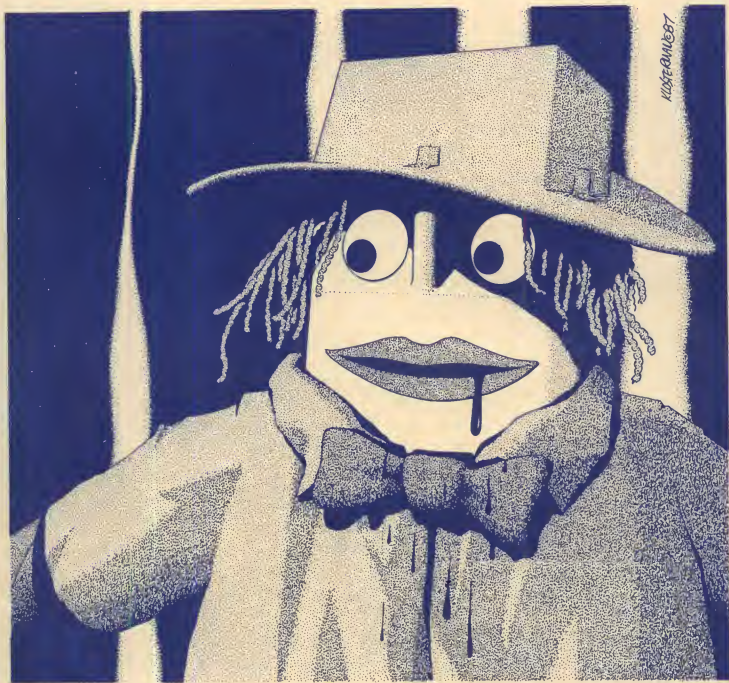
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Spring Moving Issue

#7

Spring 1988

\$3.95



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2AM (ISSN 0886-8743) is published quarterly by 2AM Publications. Address all subscriptions, editorial matter, letters to the editor, and advertising inquiries to Gretta M. Anderson, 2AM, P. O. Box 6754, Rockford, IL 61125-1754. Printed in USA. Entire contents Copyright © 1988 by 2AM Publications. All rights reserved. Letters sent to 2AM will be treated as unconditionally assigned for publication and may be subject to editing unless specified in the letter. 2AM welcomes contributions of stories, poetry, articles, reviews and artwork, but the publisher assumes no responsibility for unsolicited material. No materials will be returned without an enclosed SASE. Editorial guidelines are available on request. Individual copies are available at \$3.95 plus \$1 for postage and handling. Subscriptions are \$15.00 for one year (4 issues). 2AM is a trademark of 2AM Publications.



2AM

2AM

Hope you're keeping warm! So far this winter has been something to behold. Chicago in January is a lot like living in a freezer. We really don't know when we're going to be taken out to thaw. But as Chicagoans say about the weather: wait a couple of minutes, it'll change.

Lots of great stuff is in store for you in this issue! Along with our gang of regulars, this is 2AM's first (and hopefully, only) spring moving issue. We have a new address - PO Box 6754, Rockford, Illinois 61125-1754. More next time.

**Judith Behunin** has had several stories published in confession magazines, one in FOOTSTEPS VIII, articles in CASTLE ROCK, poems published in NEW BLOOD and POETIC JUSTICE, and a story to appear in the next issue of NEW BLOOD.

**Rex Boys** is a free-lance technical and fiction writer in Silicon Valley. He is married with 6 children, 1 grandchild called Booger (I do hope this is his nickname!) and 3 more on the way.

**Gary William Crawford** has been widely published. He is currently the editor of a scholarly journal GOTHIC and a poetry magazine SUPERNATURAL POETRY. He also has a book coming out in 1988 on Ramsey Campbell.

**Anke Kriske** is the associate editor of DOPPELGANGER and NOT ONE OF US (with husband, John Benson) and is currently working on two novels, while at home with their first child. She has been published in NEW BLOOD, BEYOND, OUROBOROS, HAUNTS, SYCOPHANT, PORTENTS, GRUE and many others.

**W. R. Lennertz** is a displaced Californian, currently living in Virginia. He enjoys racketball, music, films, old time radio shows and time spent with his fiancée. He says watching the lunar landing in 1969 on a big, black and white TV changed his life as did travelling on highway 70 in New Mexico.

**Bentley Little** is currently a faceless bureaucrat in Southern California. He's had fiction published in various horror and men's magazines and is working on getting his first novel sold.

**A. R. Morlan** was born in Chicago (yea!), has lived in California, and now resides in Wisconsin, with her umpteen cats. She has had fiction published in THE HORROR SHOW (also some quizzes - Grim Graffix), BONE-CHILLING TALES (co-written with John Postovit), GRUE, NEW BLOOD, NIGHT CRY, TWILIGHT ZONE, and DARK REGIONS. She has just finished a novel, and is in the process of getting it sold.

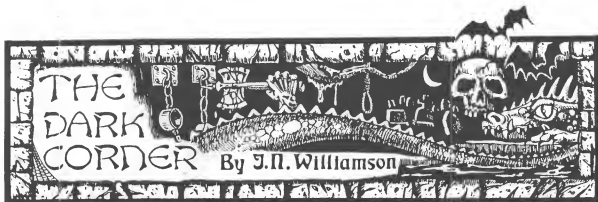
**DL Sproule** is primarily a fiction writer, with recent sales to PORTENTS, art in NOCTULPA, and SCAVENGER'S NEWSLETTER. This issue contains the first poem she has sold.

**AJ Wright** is a librarian for the Department of Anesthesiology at the University of Alabama in Birmingham. He has had over 400 poems and articles published.

Keep warm and enjoy!

Gretta

Gretta M. Anderson  
Editor and Publisher



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The Dark Corner logo designed by Alan Jude Summa

**Books under discussion:** **THE BRUCE BOSTON OMNIBUS** by Bruce Boston, Ocean View Books, 95 First St., Los Altos, CA 94022. ISBN: 0-938075-06-3, slipcased, five paperback volumes, 210 pages, \$12.95. **EXPIRATION DATES** by Jeannette M. Hopper, Regions Press, P.O. Box 6301, Concord, CA 94524. Paperbound, 34 pages, \$5. **OTHER ENGAGEMENTS** by John B. MacLay, Dream House, P.O. Box 864, Madison, WI 53701. Hardcover, 124 pages, 1000 copies, \$11. **AUDREY'S PRIVATE HAUNTS** by Audrey Parente, The Strange Company, paperbound, 64 pages, \$4. **THE NIGHT SOUND** by Ray Russell, Dream House, P.O. Box 864, Madison, WI 53701. Hardcover with dust jacket, 250 copies, \$12.

All the striking writing under discussion (and illuminating the darkness) this time was published by what is called the small press. At least, I think so; I'm uncertain about the tasteful people who collected so much of Mr. Boston's work.

And my uncertainty serves well enough as segue to the observation that it isn't always easy to think of publishers by their size when they are housing creative artists of unquestioned talent.

Before you think Williamson is idly puffing up the small press again, what less do you care to say about prose and poetry writers who have been published in places such as these: Isaac Asimov's, The Pushcart Prize, HOW TO WRITE TALES OF HORROR, FANTASY & SCIENCE FICTION, 14 VICIOUS VALENTINES (Avon), Night Cry, Twilight Zone, The Horror Show, Etchings & Odysseys, HAUNTED CASTLES and The Midatlantic Review? (I've cited, in each author's case, only two publications in which he or she has appeared.) How small...how wee, how infinitesimal...are Footsteps, the MASQUES anthologies, Grue, Cross-Currents, and Playboy -- in which one or more of the reviewed writers have been published?

There isn't space for a fullfledged review of all these publications. Admittedly, they were written for different tastes; indeed, most of what you'll find -- I recommend you look -- in the works by Boston and Russell is splendid poetry, not prose. But this, friends, is poetry to be read; felt; experienced; cherished. Even an old fiction-hand such as Yours Unruly can and does respond to lines that come soaring off the page, and that's entirely the variety Bruce and Ray have gathered in their respective volumes. Orson Scott Card, who seems to acquire an award shortly after anything he's written has been published, said "all (Boston's) poems" in his *Alchemical Texts* --

which constitutes only one-fifth of what his *OMNIBUS* offers -- are "piercingly intelligent."

And "Russellino's" poetry was called by Pulitzer Prize winner Karl Shapiro "remarkable," specifically speaking of the sonnet which the author of *INCUBUS* and *PRINCESS PAMELA* entitled "Apocalypsiad." This is a mouth-watering sample: "This is the epoch of the S/M Bar, The nude Encounter Group (repressed we ain't); A fellatrice is a Superstar, Every sub-human hoodlum is a saint."

Ms. Parente's colorful prose -- herein matched by artists Steve Fabian, Allen Koszowski and Rudolfo Ferraresi -- tends to be short, richly inventive, pungent and pointed. She is one more answer to the short-sighted and shrinking theorists who enjoy opining that women don't write horror, dark fantasy or anything hard-hitting. Her *PRIVATE HAUNTS* are intelligent and often thought-provoking.

And mentioning women who write well usually brings to my instant recollection the co-editor of that grandly offensive journal, *Gas* -- Jeannette Hopper. When you have read her first story collection, *EXPIRATION DATES* -- four genuinely frightening tales if any such ever existed -- I think you'll remember her, too. Since I wrote the introduction to this quartet of creeping horrors (and called it "Males, Motherhood, Mummy Bandages, and Howling Hooks"), I've no business going on and on about the collection. But I will quote myself to this extent: "she's sheer storyteller -- she entertains."

And much of what I've just written also applies to John MacLay, who has not published himself, except I didn't write the intro; *OTHER ENGAGEMENTS* contains a generous total of seventeen stories and Lord knows how many poems; and this is what can happen when the nicest guy you'll ever meet also disciplines and develops his talent, remembering all the while to work just as hard at the craft of fiction as he did publishing -- among other things -- Russell's *HAUNTED CASTLES* and Bill Nolan's *LOGAN'S RUN* trilogy.

In an astonishingly short period of time, bespectacled, beaming John MacLay has sold work to such publications as *Twilight Zone*, *Weirdbook*, *The Horror Show* and the forthcoming Graham Masterton anthology, *SCARE CARE*. As a follow-up to *WARDS OF ARMAGEDDON*, on which we collaborated, try John's memorable "Who Walks at Night," "The Sisters" or "Locking Up" -- all included in *OTHER ENGAGEMENTS*. It's not the writing of a publisher, but of a fine short story writer.

Here's a postscript of sorts that's meant to be motivational: How would you like to own a privately printed or limited editions collection

Here's a postscript of sorts that's meant to be motivational: How would you like to own a privately printed or limited editions collection of... (fill in the blank with your favorite fantasists in fiction or verse)? Everybody begins somewhere. Some stop, just about with publication, and were fortunate to make it that far. Others seem to go on -- like Ray Russell, apart from the fact that no one is "like" him -- to heights ascended, glories accomplished, and make your mouth water whenever you run across an ad for their early, or private, publications.

Don't be sure that isn't the fate of the writers and works I've just described. If it isn't, you've lost a relatively small quantity of money but you've also had yourself a wonderful time in the process!

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### GHOSTS, PHANTOMS AND FANTASIES

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Ghosts, phantoms and fantasies  
merge in a memory  
of October's yesterday.  
I felt you in me then  
as in a dream dimly remembered  
the next morning.  
You visited me there -  
Vermont's tiny towns,  
eerie and haunting New Hampshire  
at Halloween,  
especially Maine by the ocean.  
White curtains, ghosts  
floated across our bed,  
ethereal shadows and moonlit patterns.  
I smelled the ocean  
as I held you there.  
The bed made noise against the wall  
as you filled me then.  
Remember how you held me  
as we crossed the bridge  
in that old New England inn.  
We walked at sunset.  
Remember?  
passing lobster houses,  
quiet water alive with last light  
and you, so close and silent, you,  
a silhouette at twilight,  
my favorite time.  
Remember how you held me  
as we crossed the bridge.  
I remember but were we real?  
or ghosts, phantoms and fantasies.

-- Judith R. Behunin

# FILM REVIEWS

## BY JON HOLSINGER

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### GUIDE TO RATING SYSTEM:

- \$5 - worth \$5 and up
- \$4 - worth \$4
- \$3 - worth \$3
- \$2 - worth \$2
- \$1 - worth \$1
- REFUND - don't bother

#### ALMOST QUEEN FOR A DAY

For those of you who think that worldwide feminism is a fait accompli, consider the fairy tale.

Consider *The Princess Bride*. It's a modern fairy tale with traditional (i.e. anti-feminism/chauvinist) values.

It's a modern fairy tale in that we hear it via a smart-ass kid who barely sits still while his grandfather reads the book that he was read as a child. The kid has a typical post-E.T. room; crammed full of expensive and neglected toys and furnishings. The kid has a typical post-E.T. attitude; an adult vocabulary, unearned cynicism and contempt for anything old fashioned like books. Like any good post-Spielbergian movie kid, he squirms and makes vocal his protestation of "mushy stuff" like romance and kissing in the story his grandfather reads to him.

*The Princess Bride* is a traditional fairy tale. Like all Rob Reiner's movies, his characters are caricatures, cardboard cut-outs representing stereotypical attitudes and character types just like in a fairy tale. *The Sure Thing* featured *The Wise Guy*, *The Good Girl*, *The Good Time Girl* and *The Sidekick*. *This Is Spinal Tap* starred a prototypical Heavy Metal band: a Self-Destructive (literally) series of Drummers, the two co-Composers/Leaders/Lovers of the band, the Dense Bassist and the Inconsequential Keyboardist. *Stand By Me* starred the Smart Ass Kid, the Fat Kid, the Smart Kid, the Troubled Kid and the Troubled Kid's Hood Big Brother.

*The Princess Bride* features a Giant, a Swordsman, a Hero, a Heroine, an Evil Genius, a Wicked Prince and his Sadistic Henchman. The Giant is Big and Strong But Gentle, the Swordsman is Dangerous and Deadly But Chivalrous, the Evil Genius is Conceited and Contemptuous But Dumb. The Wicked Prince is Smarmy and Lecherous and Duplicitous; the Sadistic Henchman is Evil, Evil, Evil and a Coward. The Hero is an all-around man who outthinks the Genius, outpaces the Swordsman, outfights the Giant and defeats the Wicked Prince.

The heroine is beautiful. Period. Not Smart, Not Athletic. Not Talented, Not Courageous. Not Even Faithful -- which becomes a private joke between the hero and the heroine. Not that she sleeps with the Wicked Prince; but she becomes

affiliated to and then married to the Wicked Prince even though she swore to wait - and live - only for the Hero.

The men (who constitute all the main characters in *The Princess Bride*) are multi-talented, interesting, dynamic characters. The Heroine Buttercup just is. Pretty. An Object. The Source of Conflict, the Prize Contested For. She exists only as a plot device. She is a thing.

But in the logic of the fairy tale, beauty alone is a prize worth fighting for and risking death for. Sleeping Beauty just lies there while Prince Charming goes through hell to get to her and lift the curse. A Woodsman (or Hunter, depending on the version you know) has to save Little Red Riding Hood's bacon when only an inventory of her Grandmother's features reveal Red to be in the presence of a wolf in a nightgown.

In *The Princess Bride* our Hero, who began life as a stableboy, begged for his life from a pirate-king and learned sailing, fighting, fencing, and climbing, and saves his Buttercup from the Wicked Prince after dying in the Sadistic Henchman's torture machine. Buttercup is passed from abductor to abductor and sighs and waits and weeps and suffers -- emotionally -- for her one true love Westley, Our Hero.

True Love, we are told in fairy tales like *The Princess Bride*, is the strongest force there is.

But strong, capable, intelligent, fearless men and helpless, hopeless, beautiful women seem to be a more universal force in Rob Reiner's world and the world of the fairy tale, ancient or modern, literary or cinematic.

Sisterhood can be powerful in real life, but it ain't nothing in romance. Or the movies.

*The Princess Bride* - \$2

#### CARPENTER'S SON BLASTS SATAN (Film at eleven)

There are two ways to scare a person: make them think or make them feel.

Classic, adult horror makes you look up from the page you're reading or the TV or movie screen you're glued to and glance over your shoulder in dread. Poe, Lovecraft, Blackwood and Machen make a reader think of horrible fates and indescribable

terrors. Poe and the others make readers the prisoners to the imagination that they themselves were -- consumed by loneliness and terror and fear of premature interment and extraterrestrial creatures and primal, carnal, anarchic forces of nature and evil. The masters make you anticipate fear, which in itself makes you afraid.

Modern, puerile horror makes you squirm in your seat and cover your face to shield yourself from the images and the splattering blood exploding off pages or a TV or movie screen. The shock-meisters and splatterfilm-makers -- and authors -- make you experience a non-intellectual, visceral emotion: a physical, knee-jerk reaction to stimulus involving the premeditated banishment of thought and imagination. Childish horror is produced by nameless hacks (how many **Friday the 13th** sequels and rip-offs are there?) who create a pyrotechnic pornography of blood and violence and sadism that leaves nothing to the imagination and that leaves the reader/viewer feeling guilty and relieved afterwards... not unlike the sensations after real masturbation.

In this battle of dark vs. light, thought vs. fear, John Carpenter is on the side of the angels.

And in **Prince of Darkness**, Carpenter does what he does best. He makes "irrational" visceral movies that are really supra-rational movies; something you don't understand, let alone believe in, is trying to kill you, whether it's a curse (**The Fog**), an extraterrestrial shape-changer (**The Thing**), an indestructible Bogey Man (**Halloween**), Chinese magic (**Big Trouble in Little China**), or the imprisoned son of Satan (**Prince of Darkness**).

Carpenter seems to be on the side of the devils: he makes heart-stopping, pyrotechnic, visceral encounters with demons and monsters, myth and magic. But what seem to be childish horrors have an adult grasp of what real horror is. Carpenter knows what Poe and Lovecraft and the others knew: that adult horror means **knowledge** -- you are aware of your approaching death, you fear the possible, you tremble in the presence of oblivion, not a chainsaw. To see your own death approaching is the greatest sensation of horror, the ultimate humbling of human ambition and the extinction of the ego, the dissolution of the soul.

Carpenter has a child's sense of play and imagination and an adult's grasp of horror and reality. He juxtaposes childish, Jack-in-the-Box shocks -- the metamorphic Thing, the eternally rising Bogey Man -- with adult, rational dread; these things keep coming for you and **will kill you if they catch you**. Carpenter creates momentary,

irrational frights and jumps, the irrational fear of the child (and the id): and then plays them against the underlying, lasting, intellectual knowledge that these terrors, however impossible, are real and factual and deadly (the super-ego).

The childlike id accepts things as they are; horror just is. The adult super-ego looks for the how and why of things as they are. Carpenter uses a child's and an adult's horrors **simultaneously** to contrast fright and surprise and horror and dread. Slasher films are a Pavlovian, electrode-induced physiological stimulus-response; but surprise and an elevated pulse and heartbeat are not horror and dread, they are just simulations of horror, symptoms of fright. Carpenter and other adult horror masters create the symptoms of fright through the brain not the nerve-endings. Carpenter contrasts the Jack-in-the-Box frights that his viewers and his characters suffer with the dawning realization **through thought** that things are even worse than they seemed, even worse than the Jack-in-the-Box frights: ultimate, complete annihilation of **everything**.

**Prince of Darkness** features the same battle between dark and light, between fear and knowledge, that is in all Carpenter's films. A hand-picked group of unimaginative, empirical scientists come across an artifact that shouldn't be, a history behind the artifact that is unbelievable, and the awakening of the prisoner of the artifact that is scientifically impossible.

Carpenter makes his viewers identify completely with his characters; the disbelief and irrational fear of those killed gives way to the belief and the dread of the survivors. Survival comes to depend completely on belief that however impossible, the horror is and is deadly -- and can be defeated. Disbelief and terror and a failure of reason mean death in Carpenter films. The survivor is aware and fore-armed: the dead were -- and now are -- oblivious and helpless. Knowledge is power.

Because Carpenter films have this child/adult split, the fear vs. thought, dark vs. light battles, the films have something for everyone. **Prince of Darkness** is no exception: if you like Jack-in-the-Box frights, you'll like it. And if you're an Alice Cooper fan (yes, the Alice Cooper), you'll like **Prince**. Alice Does What Alice Cooper Does: perform a senseless act of violence and stir up an unsavory crowd of mental cases into a murderous frenzy.

Something for everyone.

**Prince of Darkness - 4**







# Rigent—Double Agent And The Shopping Cart Bump

by A. R. Morlan

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IT: "A strange magnetism which attracts both Sexes." -- "Madame" Elinor Glyn

**Tampons. Buses, buying them for their wives, now that, that marked the beginning of the end when it came to me playing the Shopping Cart Bump with Foxes,** Grant Bakker told himself while debating whether or not to go for the bigger box of Peaches and Cream flavor Quaker Instant Oatmeal ("Two More Packets!") or pick up the smaller Flavor Variety box ("New -- Strawberries and Cream!"). Man cannot live on Peaches and Cream indefinitely, so the Variety box went into the bottom of his cart, landing next to the bottle of Hot Ortega Taco Sauce and the poly bag of Kraft Shredded Mozzarella cheese.

Pushing his cart--the left rear wheel screeched with fillings-rattling abandon -- over to the "Canned/Fresh Produce" hanging orange sign, Grant reminisced about the times he'd seen a sure She Cart rounding an aisle, loaded up with such feminine, tantalizing goodies as Clairol Herbal Essence Shampoo, Apri Facial Scrub, Slim Fast, Playtex Deodorant Tampons, Melba Rounds, and Summer's Eve, a cart worthy of an aerobics instructor, or maybe, (if Grant was **verry** lucky) a female karate instructor; a cart just begging to be playfully bumped, which he would do with gleeful anticipation -- and get his cart slammed into the Green Giant veggie display by some bruiser in a Dodgers sweatshirt and size 13EEEE New Balances who'd growl "Back off, a-hole" before heading to the checkout, wife and/or girlfriend's shopping list held aloft in a massive paw. Once, Grant reminded himself as he tossed a small head of lettuce into the smaller top basket part of his cart, some guy had bumped his cart!

And as far as these new "Meet Markets" went -- forget it. Too many yo-yo brains dressed in skimpy tube tops and old geezers with slicked down hair and pencil elbows poking out of loud sport shirts. Grant had seen that picture printed nationwide a couple of years back, the one with the old guy and young woman dancing in an aisle, holding aluminum pots over their heads (**Maybe they were dancing the "Tin-man"**), and the only time he had considered himself desperate enough to actually try and attend a singles night, one look through the glass windows of the store from the safety of his parked car in the lot told him "Loser City, guy... better stick to checking out the atmosphere during commercial shoots."

It was almost enough to drive him back to the laundromat, only his agent, Aaron "the Overpaid" Bromowich, had warned him not to do going that after the pilot -- Grant's fifth in two years, and naturally the one he had decided had a snowball's chance of selling -- got picked up by the network as a Friday night mid-season replacement. Even though **Rigent -- Double Agent** had an option for only six shows, and five of those were already in the can, the damned thing hadn't been seen by any-

one in the "viewing public" (a.k.a. the guys in the size 13EEEE New Balances who bought tampons), yet Aaron warned Grant that letting himself become "overexposed" was akin to signing his own death warrant. When Grant told Aaron that that remark made him feel like a roll of past due Fugi Film in a "Half-Price" bin, Aaron wagged a manicured finger at him over lunch and warned, "Grant, Gr-aunt, they see you behaving like one of them" -- his tone suggested that hordes of slugs and centipedes were about to overtake Grant's Caesar salad -- "then they might as well watch the guy next door through a chink in the Levelors. And Grant, think, if we get a food sponsor, like maybe the catsup guys who don't run through the sieve, how would it look if somebody sees you buying the kind that **does** run through the sieve like tap water? What if they take a picture --"

"Can't I bean 'em with a can of pumpkin pie filling?"

"No, smartass, no more stores, no McBurger places, no more laundromats and don't-give-me-that -smirk -- aren't you even a teensie bit scared of AIDS, bubble? -- and no more picking up of the floozies!"

Grant had sighed over his salad and mineral water with a twist of lime; things hadn't been this bad when he only did commercials. Six of them, that's all it had taken for him to get noticed; first by the dips who wrote in to TV Mailbox, Glad You Asked That! and Walter Scott's Personality Parade ("Please, some information about the hunk in the Egg-Drop Waffles commercials -- I think I'm in love!" C.Y., Last Chance, USA), then by the industry.

Most schlammazels like Grant, plucked raw and barely trained from commercial heap, got to make a couple of pilots before getting the kiss-off. But Grant Bakker had a quality which, had he been up and coming in the 1920's, would have been dubbed "IT." Not much talent, the basic drive of a hungry water leech, but lots of "IT," whatever "IT" was. (And this was long before Stephen King redefined the capitalized term, in the days when a would-be aristocrat named "Madame" Elinor Glyn held Hollywood under her passionate thumb.) At least "IT" got him a show, which the networks thought highly enough of to plug endlessly during breaks in the Superbowl this past Sunday. And "IT" paid the rent on the shamelessly overpriced high rise duplex Aaron moved him into last month, along with enough good food and good wine ("White, Grant, must watch those calories" -- "Stuff it, Aaron") to last the month, which ended this morning. Where Aaron expected him to get more food, especially after solemnly warning Grant, "No delivery boys, they will sell their souls for a star's address and will start selling it on street corners to rubber necks in big tour busses as soon as they make change for you," was anybody's guess.. except Grant's. After trying to reach Aaron for twenty stomach-rumbling minutes, Grant picked up

an Egg McMuffin, then toolled down to the Mayfair. New show on the tube next week or not, soon-to-be Big Star Grant Bakker Esq. was hungry (for food and other...sundries) and the cash register didn't care how many shows he had in the cans.

After finding a tomato that looked reasonably plump without seeming "gooshy," Grant was about to head over to the frozen dinners when he saw THE cart, slowly rounding to his left. It had to belong to one of the "sundries" that Grant hungered for (since the AIDS crap, not all starlets -- or even atmosphere -- put out); a huge sack of long grain brown rice, Ivory soap, alfalfa sprouts, low-cal Buttermilk dressing, a loafa, the current issue of COSMOPOLITAN, a L'eggs Egg, a single roll of Scott toilet tissue (pink), and a loaf of diet wheat bread. Had to be a She Cart. No feminine napkins or douche, but what self-respecting husband or boyfriend would buy a single roll of pink toilet paper? His lady would kill him, or worse, hog it all for herself.

The odd tingly feeling started in his Fruit of the Looms and shot down to the soles of his 10D Nikes. Leer of anticipation forming on his flawless lips (commercial number four: Lip-Cote with Sunblock), Grant gave the He Cart a light push -- just the slightest flex of the thumbs and wrist -- which sent it gallantly sailing off toward heaven on four black wheels. Contact. A high-pitched "Ooooh!" then an arm clad in a red satinette baseball jacket snaked around to grab the handle of the She Cart -- Grant got a quick glimpse of brilliant orange frosted polish on fairly short nails (good, she won't be a back-raker) -- and yanked it around and back. Common and get me, Big Boy. Grant had thought that that play had gone the way of elastic feminine napkin belts and cyclamate sweetened soft drinks. If the force behind that cart was really playing the game, she'd be lingering in the next aisle, waiting for a bump from behind... on her behind.

Grant hadn't felt so goofy-giddy since the first time a girl let him French her (Angie Calder, at the now-defunct Ewerton Drive-in back in his home state of Wis-Con-Sin, in -- could it be that long ago? -- 1960) and while he didn't know just what was waiting for him in Aisle 6 "Sugar/Flour/Cake Mixes" it sure as shit didn't wear size 13EEEE running shoes!

In fact, she was wearing red high top sneakers, the kind with the big fat silver eyelets, fat patterned laces and thick gummy soles. Black panty hose, artfully snagged, electric blue pin-stripe pedal pushers, a Hawaiian print shirt so loud and badly patterned that "Weird Al" Yankovich wouldn't touch it, and the red satinette jacket he'd seen before. With a clipped chenille applique of a bowling ball and two tipsy pins across the back. The hair wasn't bad; what he could see of it was caught up in a long wavy tail -- no Mohawk! -- and he didn't mind the color mauve. Her yellow baseball cap hid the rest of her hair.

Not quite the girl who married dear old Dad, but Hell, Grant was adaptable. Besides, he'd never had a punker type -- she looks like a station identification spot for MTV -- before. Take that, paparazzi! She was still walking ever so slooowly, persuing the unleached flour. And could it be true... did Grant actually detect the slightest wiggle of flesh under those pin-stripes?

The cart was out of his hands before he realized it. After bumping her lightly in the buns, Newton's Law took over and rolled it home to Papa. Now. Don't blow it. He hurriedly slipped on his "Gee, I'm sorry Miss" face and lowered his

puppy-dog eyes. (Commercial number two: close-up of his look of "oooh, aaah" as his on-screen wife brings out a box-mix cake.)

"Oh, Mister, I'm sorry I'm in the way, let me move over --"

All Grant could think was: What's her face... that singer with the wrestler friends -- OH! God I've bumped a geriatric Cyndi Lauper Dress-Alike!

The bumpee's wrinkled face -- more like wrinkles with a hint of a face underneath -- lit up with a huge grin that showed sound teeth behind the green lipstick (which was beginning to bleed into the wrinkles surrounding her mouth, like shoots coming from a plant) before she shrilled "Ooooh! It's Grant Bakker! I cannot believe it!"

How thrilling, he thought, Gee whizz and golly gee, my first in-the-saggy-flesh fan... take'r easy, hot shot Double Agent Rigent, maybe grannies just want to have fun, too. Probably has a Nielsen box hooked up to her set. Maybe she'll get all her friends to watch, or her kids -- he noticed that her knobby, wrinkled fingers sported no rings -- oh hell, she must have friends who will tune in...

"-- never thought that I'd meet a Real Star in here of all places!" she was enthusing, making the words "Real Star" sound like they were in capital letters on a movie marquee. By now she'd turned her cart around to face his, and was babbling a mile a second in a very youthful sounding voice. Grant thanked God for that when someone said "Old Lady" to him, he'd immediately think two things -- quavery voices and saggy armpits under sleeveless cotton shifts. He smiled down at her (she was a good foot shorter than his six-one), noticing that under the harsh white glare of the store lighting, her green eyes sparkled, matching the twinkle of the rhinestones in the three earrings she wore. As she talked and gestured animatedly, Grant was overcome with a strange impulse; a part of him wanted to put his big hand under the hollow V of her jawbone and gently tilt her head up, and then he'd bend down, lips pursed... crazy, he thought, she's old enough to be my grandma. Clearing his head of the weird impulse, he saw that what bones were visible under the wrinkles and sag were good; maybe fifty, sixty years ago she would have been a fox.

"-- used to be I'd see Real Stars all the time, but lately they all go around in-cog-nito like that Debra Winger girl, with no make-up, or nice clothes on, so's you can't recognize them, and their Fans just end up passing them right by, without a chance to even ask for an autograph--"

(Take your "overexposure is a death warrant" song and dance and shove it, Aaron!)

"-- should know about Real Stars, I've been out here from the start, the very beginning, and if I don't know right from the first moment that I see a body that that person is indeed a Real Star, then he or she just isn't one!" Pausing for a second to chew a bit of green-coated skin from her lips, she then added, "Aren't I right?"

"Uhhh... yeah, I guess the star system isn't what it used to be --"

"Phooey, lots of these goomers trapping around on the tube or up on the screen aren't Real Stars any more than -- than... this here bag of flour! She dumped a five-pound bag of Robin Hood unleached into her cart, when it sent up a fine white plume of dust motes. "Ain't got any Life in 'em, just a bunch of phoney-baloneys. Not worth watching out for. Now when I was young, that's when the Stars were for Real. On screen or off, no mistaking them for common people." Tossing a

packet of Robin Hood Applesauce Muffin Mix in next to the flour, she moved her cart down the aisle, continuing her harangue. Grant dutifully followed, bemused by her intensity. And those really... green eyes. His fingers, as they held onto the handle of the cart, longed to feel the thin bones under her jaw...

Despite the fanzies-groupie mentality, she had a certain gauche charm, not unlike that Granny Pot poster he had hanging on his dorm wall back at UCLA (where Grant was working on his degree in Biology -- was that really fifteen years ago? he idly wondered), making her seem both hip and out of it at the same time. Clara Peller goes punk, that sort of thing.

He threw a packet of corn muffin mix into his cart as he followed; not that his coming along or staying behind would have had an effect on the loud burble of words which issued from that leafy-green mouth, effectively drowning out the spiritless grocery muzak which surrounded them. (Now I know the source of M'Lady's appeal... her tender green lips have tapped the tapping root of my forgotten biologist's heart -- aw, bullshit.)

"Like I was saying, if anyone should know about... Real Stars, it is me. When I was young, I worked for some of the best of them, or those who should have been the best, all of the Real Stars right down to their --"

"You worked for some of them? Now that's really something... care to drop any names -- I mean, if you don't want --" Grant had a sudden vision of alienating his only Big Fan, maybe his lone Nielsen viewer...

"Mind? Oh, no, I'm proud of what I did... for those beautiful people. Ah me. God bless their dear souls. Mr Bakker -- Grant, then -- put down that ground beef! No good for you. No, no! Ground turkey's much better -- that's a good boy! As I was saying, I worked for some of the fastest rising Stars in old Hollywood, back when the place was called by its rightful name, Hollywoodland."

"No kidding? I never knew it was called that. And it was all written out in white letters up on the hill --"

"All thirteen letters of it. 'Course, after some starlets took the big dive off the final "D" they eventually tore down the last four letters. No use inviting more bad luck. But anyhow, back at the birth of it all, I was a cleaning girl for none other than Miss Gladys Smith, also known as --" she fanned the sides of her wizened face with wide open hands in a "Ta-Da!" gesture -- "Mary Pickford! I didn't stay on for too long there, what with her baby brother Jack getting hitched to that beautiful Miss Olive Thomas... Lordy, what a pretty woman, and such a talent, too. Not only Mr. Zigfield's Follies when she was no more than a girl, but later those movies -- *The Tomboy*, and, naturally, *The Zigfield Girl*. Anyhow, since they were kids themselves, just twenty or so, they wanted someone their own age to work for them, and Miss Pickford let me go. A great thrill, let me tell you, being a heartbeat away from the big screen like that. Later that year I got to go to Europe; Paris, France, in fact, with her. That was 1920, September of the year --"

"Must have been exciting --" (She must be old, Grant Baby.)

Waving her orange-tipped fingers around her head in a rather flapperesque gesture, she trilled, "Lordy, yes! And me from a dinky mining town up in northern California. Pity, though, I didn't get to see much of the city before I came home alone." Changing the subject with a toss of her

purplish ponytail, she wagged a finger at Grant, "Those taco shells aren't the good kind, see, these here are made from stone ground corn, not the processed goop." She removed the offending box from his cart and exchanged it for the brand she recommended.

Too enthralled by her history lesson, Hollywoodland style, Grant forgave her pushiness (poor thing is used to doing for people) as he asked, "Not to be nosy, but what happened that you got sent home alone? Did she fire --"

"Oh no no no! It wasn't anything that I did!" She placed a bony hand on his tanned forearm, leaning close. "Miss Olive couldn't send me home. She died, you see," her voice lowered to a clear, firm whisper, "Killed herself, as a matter of fact. Swallowed toxic bichloride of mercury granules -- nasty stuff -- right in the best room of the Hotel Crillon. Spread out her new sable cape and laid down mother naked to die. When I saw her after I woke up the next morning, with the bottle still in her hand, I packed my bags and bolted before any of the hotel staff saw her, Chicken poop thing to do, in retrospect, but I was just a scared mining town girl in Froggie-land, and me not knowing the lingo, I figured I'd better amscray!" Up close, her breath smelled of Juicy Fruit gum; such a pungent, youthful odor made her story of long-ago death (if Miss Olive had lived, would she look like her?) seem all the more unreal. Yet, now that he thought about it, Grant did seem to remember reading or hearing about Olive Thomas, perhaps a Sunday paper magazine article, or a rehash in a check-out counter rag. It seemed to him that she had had dark hair. Long, wavy, touchable dark hair.

"I was just lucky that I found my round-trip ticket in my panic!" she continued in a normal-sounding voice. "But that wasn't the end of the sorry affair. Later on, agents of the U. S. Government cracked a drug ring, and in the notebook of a dope pusher, guess whose name was listed ... as a steady customer? A lot of people believed it, that poor Miss Olive was doing dope, but I am not one of them. Olive was a common name then, as was Thomas. Nor did I believe that Mr. Jack was hooked on that horrible junk, but once a rumor's allowed to run away, there's no use shutting the barn door to keep it in! It almost made me leave Hollywoodland for good, it did!"

"But you didn't," Grant prompted nonchalantly, placing a jumbo roll of Mardi Gras red tablecloth check paper towels into his cart. She placed the matching paper napkins in her cart before replying.

"For a couple of years I stuck to cleaning house for minor people in the business -- camera men, editors, and such-like. No life to 'em, a real bunch of dead beats. Even did a little extra work in pictures I can't remember the names to. Got two bucks a pop and a box lunch for each one I did. Sort of hand to mouth for awhile. Didn't meet any rising Real Stars, either. But within a couple of years my dry spell was over, and I was back on top, working the Westlake district, here and there, but mostly at a director's house on Alvarado Street. That was until he passed on, and I took my services elsewhere --"

"Who -- was this director... I mean, I was wondering if I'd ever heard of him -- I mean, was he big in the business?"

Her green eyes sparkled with a gleefulness that seemed inappropriate, under the circumstances. "I should say that William Desmond Taylor was a big man... he stood over six feet tall!

Sorry to pull your leg, Mr. -- Grant, but yes, he was very important. A bigwig with Famous Players Lansky, had all the girls crawling over him like flies on a candy apple. In fact --" now breathing her Juicy Fruit breath as close to his ear as her tippy-toes stance would allow " -- Mr. Taylor was in the habit of keeping little souvenirs, if you know what I mean. Lacy things women didn't show in public -- not like these girls letting their bra-straps hang out -- things you didn't show except to your Mister. He was a real Romeo, but had a face like a mule's backside, if you want my opinion. Real live wire, though. Man was ripping with life. When they found that prissy Mary Miles Minter's little pink nightie in his stash after his shooting, it blew her star right out of the heavens. Didn't do Mabel Normand or Mrs. Shelby much good either when he --"

Minter and Normand were familiar enough to Grant, but who the hell was Mrs. Shelby?

"She was Miss Minter's momma. All three of them gals were having affairs with the fella, right under each other's noses. Very sticky, all them comings and goings... a neighbor lady thought he was shot by a woman... the likely scenario, if you ask me. Somebody probably trying to get her bloomers back, mark my words."

Fighting off the urge to cup that little chin in his big hand, Grant knew the answer to the question he was about to ask, but the need to know for sure made him ask it anyway. "But you went back to work for the Hollywood crowd, didn't you? Even after your two bosses died --"

Nonplussed by the darkness of his tone, she replied, "Why yes! I loved the business, even if I wasn't in films -- extra work don't count, actually. Now don't go thinking that all my bosses went and died on me the minute I set foot in the door. They didn't at all. Take Mrs. Reid for an example. Just because her Wallace was hooked on the smack, "dope fiend" the trades were calling him, and passed on in the looney hatch back in '23, doesn't mean that I had anything to do with that. Wally was a goner from the dope no matter what I did or didn't do. Once that pusher was at the studio, that "Count" fella, as he called himself, or he was called, I forget which -- and you'd die if I told you who he really was, a man you'd never suspect -- anyhow, once the "Count" fixed someone up with dope, they were as good as dead. Some sooner, some later, but all as good as dead in the end. You don't do drugs, do you Grant? Good. Because, know what? You remind me a little bit of poor Wallace... especially around the nose. Anyhow, Florence -- Mrs. Reid, or maybe you've heard of her as Dorothy Davenport, her old screen name -- she didn't die until her natural time came, and since Wally died away from home, while he was 'put away,' I never thought of him in the same way I did Miss Olive or Mr. Taylor. Wally was a live wire, though..."

"But Miss La Marr... poor, dear, live-a-life-time-in-a-day Barbara, after she passed on I did feel awfully jinxed. Barbie passed on in '26. Nice girl, bit flighty, but o.k... had umpteen husbands. Never got enough sleep, why two hours a night isn't enough for a mutt's flea! Claimed she had "better things" to do, like get hitched over and over... and shoot smack. The junk was the cause of her death -- just sucked the life right out of her -- but good food, natural things, and lots of sleep can yank the biggest monkey off a --"

Grant paused in the middle of two rows of cleaning supplies, the sharp odor fighting for his

attention (commercial number three: "Honey, is that floor really dry? With a shine like that?"), while he hung back as she progressed to the next aisle. "The Girl Who Was Too Beautiful," he said softly to himself. And she had been, if the pictures he'd seen didn't lie. Her, he remembered. Douglas Fairbanks, Sr. discovered her, if he remembered correctly. He wondered if his Technicolor shopping partner (and you scoffed at Meet Markets) had given Miss La Marr a reference from Fairbanks' former brother-in-law, Jack Pickford, widower of Miss Olive... now don't be a prick, Grant, he scolded himself, suppose someone poked fun at all those unsold pilots of yours, old bat can't help it if she's unlucky. Typhoid Mary of Hollywoodland, with the thirteen letters.

"There you are!" Grant's rear end was bumped by the metal cage-work of her cart, oddly cold through his worn Klein jeans. Pushing her cart abreast of his, she went on with her recitation, oblivious to the squall of the toddler behind them which rose high and shrill above the Muzak: "Hurt me, lady hurt me... got my ham" Momma, mean lady hurt me!" and the exhausted drone of his mother "Shawn, the nice old lady didn't hurt you... now shut up!"

-- and everyone just knew that old Louis B. had something to do with what came out of those speakers during His Glorious Night, why poor Mr. Gilbert sounded positively neutered, and it's a fact that he had a very nice voice; I should know since I heard it every day when I worked for him and that snooty Ina --"

(Behind them, the toddler sucked on his swiftly purpling hand and screamed between sucks, "Lady hurt me!" as his mother mumbled to him to shush up already...)

-- such a horrid shame, since other people who didn't know him face to face believed that John Gilbert really did sound that bad, no wonder poor Jack went straight to the bottle, especially after that bitch -- excuse my French -- that bitch of a wife Ina Claire left him, so it was no surprise, at least not to me, when he finally drowned in it in '36. Lemme see, that was the... fifth year I'd worked for him, but let me reiterate, the man had a very lovely voice." She placed a small bottle of Ivory dishwashing detergent next to her paper napkins before turning to Grant and asking, "Did your grandparents ever tell you about Dish Nights at the movie theatres? The local Bijous would do anything to get folks to spend a dime at the films; Two Fers, Marcel Night coupons I went to get quite a few of those myself until I discovered purple henna, which looked quite natural with my black hair -- where was I? Oh yes, just all sorts of promotions to bring in a warm body. I enjoyed the movies so much, best way to spot new Real Stars, that I had to take on a weekend job while I was still working at the Gilberts."

"You were able to get two jobs? At once? So soon after the Depression? You must have had some damned impressive references." Grant recalled the stories his Grampa Baker -- one "K" in those days for Grant, too -- told him about his hometown Ewerton during the Depression; how the movie theatre closed down, not to be replaced until the '50's with the now closed drive-in; how Old Man Feger at the Founder's Bank tried to shoot himself and only succeeded in blowing a new doorway between his office and the one next door; how the Town Council had to put up a "Jobless Men -- Keep Walking!" sign next to the "Welcome to Ewerton" sign... yet, somehow, this woman had managed to

find two jobs while times were hard. Granted, the job situation in Hollywood was somewhat better than in rural Wisconsin, but could it have been that much better?

"Oh, I did, I did. The industry takes care of its own, no matter how low on the totem pole you are... you should know that. Got me a dish-washing job, two nights weekly at a little place tucked away in the Palisades... and I know you'll recognize the lady's name, the one who ran the joint," she taunted coyly. Fighting to keep his hands from cupping that small jaw (weird, Grant, weird --), he took the bait.

"Try me."

"How 'bout 'Thelma Todd's Roadside West'? Have the bells started ringing?" Without waiting for an answer, she scurried off toward the Cards section. Grant covered the distance, cart wheels screeching, in two easy strides. "Hey, who doesn't remember that dish? The 'Ice Cream Blonde' in all those Marx Brothers com --"

"And it's a pity they never did find out who killed her, either."

An image that Grant hadn't wanted to recall came back to him; a tousled blonde, bleeding onto a fur coat, spilling out of a car like some sort of gory Cracker Jack prize falling out of box. She had had such a lively smile -- oh shit, now I'm thinking like her, 'lively' this and 'live wire' that...

"Pretty girl, vivacious as all get out, but I really didn't get the chance to know her all that well. She looked real good in her coffin. Yellow flowers. They had a blanket of yellow roses over her." She began to search through the Sympathy/Get Well selection of cards on the long rack. Grant saw her orange-tipped fingers linger over cards meant for families who have lost a male relative, and something deep, something protective of himself at a primitive level that even surpassed his strange longings just to kiss those green smeared lips once, made Grant attempt a fast, but polite break for the checkout line, and freedom. Toes crossed in his Nikes in hopes that she'd refuse, Grant said, "I'm afraid that I'm done with my shopping. Would you like me to carry your bags? Or do you have some more shopping to do --"

Plucking a card out of the Sympathy assortment before her, she gave him a big smile, then tore a shred of skin off her lip with a hungry, almost mindless motion, bringing a thin line of blood to the surface. Flicking the bit of greenish white skin aside, she said, "No need to wait, I'm all done, too. And I wouldn't want to miss out on the chance to take a walk to the parking lot with a Real Star. They are so rare these days!"

Ignoring the slow writhe in his guts, and the rebukes of his subconscious, Grant dutifully followed her to the nearest checkout lane. As his hands fanned the smooth surface of the cart handle in preparation before the inevitable grasping of her fragile chin (will her hat fall off when her head tilts back?) Grant vaguely recalled Aaron, and his warnings, but dimly, a siren blowing under miles of swirling water. Maybe, when he got home, he'd call Aaron, let him in on Grant Bakker's first weird, but cute (when she was young, she must have been a -- ) fan... preferably while slipping -- no, make that gulping -- a double Scotch on the rocks. And screw the calories. Her eyes ... so utterly, flawlessly green. Maybe, after getting done with her, he'd need a triple Scotch, forget the rocks.

As he followed her out the automatic doors, his hands unconsciously spanned the bag he was

holding, spreading just wide enough to support that tender jawline.

From three blocks away, Lt. Wynter couldn't tell who was in trouble in the Mayfair parking lot, the old lady bending over the prone man on the ground, or the man himself. From her vantage point on the motorcycle, the police officer couldn't quite tell if the man was trying to fix a nearby car or simply lying there... putting on speed, the officer soon saw that the woman (middle aged, definitely -- sun must have been shining in my eyes) was trying to do something to the man, who was quite still on the ground, it did and didn't look like CPR; the woman (wait a minute, Wynter, that's no woman, looks like a co-ed, college kid, probably... only wasn't her hair lighter before? Must've been the sun, the things these kids spray on their hair --) was doing the mouth to mouth part all right, but no heart massage. As Lt. Wynter came within ten yards of the scene, she noticed that the girl (college girl hell, that's a kid, barely a teen-ager, poor thing, not knowing what to do in an emergency) wasn't coming up for air herself, but grinding her mouth down hard on the man's unmoving face, and for a second the officer wondered if she had stumbled onto a street girl and her trick, but when the girl heard the motorcycle coming close, she looked up, tears in her eyes, and motioned for the policewoman to come closer. Clumsily getting to her feet (looks like she ripped her pantihose, helping the guy... it's what a good Samaritan can expect nowadays) the girl stammered in a choking voice, "He fell down! I was heading for home and I saw him fall down, grasping his chest! I didn't know what to do! And I wanted to ask him for his autograph, too! I did the mouth to mouth thing, but it didn't work! Is he dead?" As she checked the man's pulse (White male, mid-forties or older, six-one or two, maybe 150-60, and what the hell did she say about an autograph?) Lt. Wynter was taken aback by the girl's remarks. Looking up into the girl's face (most of her green lipstick had smeared off onto the man's slack face), squinting her own eyes against the sun's glare, Lt. Wynter asked, "You know who this man is?"

Brightening considerably, considering that she had just been rubbing noses with a dead man, the girl chirped, "Oh yes! He's -- he was -- Grant Bakker, the commercial guy... he was gonna be in that show they advertised on the Superbowl, that Rigent -- Double Agent one." Then, as if noting the officer's disapproving stare, the girl adjusted her yellow baseball cap and spoke in a slightly more appropriate tone of voice, as if it had just dawned on her that she was standing a sneaker's length from a dead man.

"He was really good... I could tell, just from watching the commercials, that he was gonna be a Real Star" -- her voice added the caps -- "and when I saw him here, just before he began to clutch at his chest, I thought 'There aren't too many Real Stars like that anymore --'" Despite the fact that the girl was an obvious movie mag junkie (or worse) the officer found herself liking the child, for some odd reason. True, she botched the mouth to mouth and apparently didn't even attempt any sort of CPR, no matter how crude (as if the TV hadn't shown how to do it often enough... she could have at least pounded on his chest a few times, that's been known to work) but yet... Lt. Wynter couldn't stay angry with the little thing.

Standing there, looking down at the officer, forlorn yet somehow in command in her shiny red

jacket and pathetic looking flowered shirt, not to mention those ripped up hose (the officer had a fleeting, painful memory of her own mother beating her with a wire coathanger for wearing her mini-skirt too short on a school day... Christine Crawford, you ain't alone), the girl fumbled in her jacket pocket for something, all the while giving the woman hunkered down next to the dead man a look of longing, of sadness that could be so easily remedied... as Lt. Wynter double-checked the man's wrist for a pulse, her hand ached to touch the creamy skin under the girl's tiny chin, to cup the delicate bones in her hand, tilt that head of glossy purplish-dark hair, and --

Totally straight all her life, the policewoman shuddered upon realizing what her mind was asking her to do, and she told herself, *This kid isn't a whore... I'll stake my badge on it, but I don't know what she is. Poor thing, she's had a bad experience -- wait a second, Wynter, don't go soft on this one...*

The girl put on a pair of sunglasses; red plastic heart-shaped frames. The perspiration on her small nose made them slide down half-way, and Lt. Wynter realized that the girl reminded her of someone... as the girl bent down to pick up the two Mayfair shopping bags (a roll of red-checked paper towels topped one, and a roll of pink t.p. and a rolled up issue of COSMOPOLITAN topped the other) the officer knew who the girl looked like. Sue Lyons and the poster for Lolita. While still crouching down, the girl said to the officer, in a gum-redolent whisper, "Do I have to go to the station? I'm supposed to be home by now, I'm bringing the food for a party, and if my parents find out about this" she cocked her head toward the dead would-be TV star "they'll kill me!"

Years on the LAPD made Lt. Wynter well aware that the girl was lying about something, and that she should get a full statement from the girl, at the station, but the ache in her fingers to just cup that chin once, and bring her lips close to those which had recently tasted death made her -- urged her -- to tell the girl, "This is pretty much an open and shut case, I don't think I'll need a statement after all. Why don't you go home--" she noticed that the bag with the paper towels held a package of rapidly thawing ground meat "before your meat thaws out." Get away from me, please kid, please.

Hefting the two full bags, the girl got to her feet, and smiled a thank-you at the officer, then began to furiously chew her gum. The smell was odd, for some reason; familiar, yet not the wild sort of scent the police woman associated with young kids. The girl slowly began to walk away, and once again, the officer's urges got the better of her.

"If you decide to make a statement, just come to the headquarters in this neighborhood. Ask for Lt. Wynter. Lt. Carrie Wynter," while her mind raged *Don't tell her your name, my God --*

Without breaking stride, the girl looked over her shoulder and said, "I don't think I'll be able to make it, but I'll keep that in mind," in a tone of voice that said she wouldn't, that she would forget all about the police woman, in her quest for Real Stars. With capitals.

Sighing, Lt. Wynter couldn't help feel both sad and relieved.

Later, as she wrote up her report at the station, Lt. Wynter remembered the name of the girl's gum.

Juicy Fruit.



# Mercy

by J. N. Williamson

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HE'D HAD LITTLE choice but to kill her for quite awhile and he'd known it, but actually **doing it** -- that was the hard part. Until tonight.

Because he'd loved her in his own uncommunicative fashion. No longer with the passion of youth, which was scarcely yesterday in Thomas' case, but loved her. Enough.

But now it was clear to him that his new obligation was no longer avoidable. He'd have done the same for a house pet without a qualm, so how could he do less for a wife of forty years?

Damn it, it wasn't her fault she had grown increasingly senile and turned every day of their lives together into a weird guessing game. "Do you know who I am, Charlotte?" he'd ask, and she responded -- if she answered him at all -- with the coy expression of a slow-witted child. On some days, the guessing game worked the other way around: "Thomas, is this a hotel? Where are we? Are we on vacation?" In the house they'd occupied for more than thirty of their forty years of marriage!

Of course, he had felt truly sorry for her, back when it began. He'd hauled her to a doctor, then a psychiatrist. Fed her vitamins and medicine and played the guessing game religiously until, at times, he'd begun to doubt his own sanity and wondered if the time might come when he, too, was unable to recognize his own damned possessions.

Yet Charlotte had gone relentlessly downhill. Finally, they'd told him there was nothing more to be done and turned his everyday world into a ceaseless series of chores even the sturdy young men he'd hired for the job eventually balked at handling. Without a hint or hope that life would ever become remotely easier; without possibility that Charlotte would ever get an iota better.

Deep inside, Thomas both resented his circumstances and was terrified by them. Angry, too, at the unfairness. Such emotions were the penultimate ones he'd had to face, to come to grips with, before tonight.

And now that he had, Charlotte was going to die. Now. In her sleep, or what passed for it these nightmarish days, these endless nights. By his own hand, yes -- but unarguably, this was a mercy killing and no one rational could quarrel with that. What with that two-dollar word they used for it? Thomas paused at her bedroom door, thinking and trying not to step on the places in the floor that squealed like mice. **Euthanasia**, that was it. He wouldn't be murdering her, he'd be... resorting to euthanasia.

When it was over, Jeannette, who'd been Charlotte's first visiting nurse, would be waiting for him.

He whispered **Euthanasia** repeatedly while he pressed down with the pillow, molding its soft contours over Charlotte's face. He whispered the

new word huskily during the short struggle, shouted it at the top of his voice when she nearly wriggled free, as if he had to get through to her, convince Charlotte that this was right; merciful.

Done, exhausted, Thomas sank to the edge of the bed, nerves singing the word back to him. She'd almost squirmed away once and he was too tired to remove the pillow. "You know," he said aloud, "it was the thing to do." He was rewarded by silence, and a peaceful feeling he found exceedingly reassuring.

Sighing heavily, squaring his shoulders, Thomas reached across the body, groping with one hand for the pillow and, with the other, for the small bed lamp. **Euthanasia**; a pretty, musical word. "It was," he murmured as subdued lighting greyed the image before him, "an act of mercy."

The pillow came away as freely as the shriek of shock and horror from the old man's throat.

Beautiful, sensual Jeannette -- who'd understood perfectly why an active and virile man could not go on being saddled by a senile idiot -- who'd stood by his side two years ago when he'd put Charlotte to sleep the first time -- stared palely, sightlessly, up at him.

It came slowly to Thomas' waning memory that, after Jeannette had helped the jury to grasp his humanitarian reasoning, he'd remarried. Aghast, he saw then that -- somehow, in some terrible way he couldn't conceivably understand -- he'd forgotten marrying his lovely, exciting, cooperative Jeannette.

And no jury in the world would believe for a moment that the thirty-year-old beauty in his first wife's bed had suffered from Alzheimer's...





BORK



# Making Do

by Rex Boys

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An' thist as she kicked her heels an'  
turn't to run and hide  
They was 'two great Big Things a standin'  
by her side.  
An' they smatched her through the cellin'  
'fore she knewed what she's about!

An' the Gobble-Ums'll git you  
Ef you  
Don't  
Watch  
Out!

From "Little Orphan Annie"  
By James Whitcomb Riley

## I

The little push at the hips that kept the old rocking chair rocking had been automatic now for a lot of years and the little squeak with each push was more comforting than annoying; at least it was tonight. Martha sat and rocked in the dark by the open window in the dining room that looked out the back toward the barn. The thin curtains by the window were a gauge of the stillness of the night, but they did seem to move, although it couldn't be said that the air moved at all. The curtains sort of pulsed, slowly, as if the dark of the night outside leaned in a little, then the dark in the room leaned out a little, over and over; and the thin wisps of Martha's blue-white hair pulsed with the curtains. Indiana August nights were like that; the humid heat of the day boiled the air down 'till it was thicker than air ought to be, and if something moved out there in the dark a body could feel it on her face. When they could have afforded air conditioning, years ago, there wasn't any such thing for farmhouses; just for business buildings over in Indianapolis. Now on a hot, still night like this one, even a window fan would be welcome, and there were two or three around the place somewhere, but having one wasn't the problem; using electricity and running up the bill was the problem. They didn't even use the lights any more after dark unless there was a real need.

Martha rocked and watched the one window in the barn where a flickering light showed. A regular movement of some shadow within reflected on that window. Martha concentrated on that one window across the yard and the barnlot through the thick, hot August night, where Reuben was doing his night work. She clamped her lower lip fast between her false teeth, chewing and breathing and watching; willing each second to pass, until the movement would stop and the coal oil lantern that Reuben used would go out. Then she knew she would hear the scrape of the barn door, the sound of

Reuben making his slow heavy way across the lot, and the slap of the back screen door. Then Reuben would come in the room from the kitchen and lay his hand gently on her arm, and she would rise up and go in to the bed with him like always.

Martha knew what Reuben was doing out there, she had even gone to look one time, but she never would again. He ground up meat and bone for the small army of stray dogs that he kept in the kennels he had made in the old outbuildings where he used to keep the tractors and other implements when they had the land to farm. He went out there about once a week now, always after being away for a while, then coming home in the old station wagon. He put the stuff through an old hand grinder that his father had used when he did the rendering for the county, and she sat by the back window and watched the barn in the dark, and ever' so often she would hear the muffled thwack of the cleaver he used to make manageable chunks for the grinder. The old hand-cranked machine was slow, but it ground up everything, meat and bone alike. When he was done he would put the ground up stuff into the covered black buckets that new had held white paint for the barns; except for some that he packed in the little white take-out boxes with the wire bales that he got from the Chill Kitchen in town. These cartons were for old friends to feed their pets, so they wouldn't have to spend their pension money on dog or cat food. Reuben would put the buckets in the underground cellar for the night, where it was cooler, and he'd deliver the take-outs in the morning.

## II

It was Wednesday morning, four days since she had last watched in the night from the dining room window, and Martha supposed that the dogfood must be running low. She put the mug of steaming black coffee down on the checkered oilcloth in front of Reuben and went back to the sink and the dirty dishes. She set it down a little hard maybe, and the effect wasn't lost on Reuben. "Damn," he thought. "There she goes again. And that look'd stop a clock." Then aloud: "What's eating at you, old woman?"

Martha half turned toward him with the same grim tight-mouthed look she'd given him before, then turned back and talked out the window while she swished some silverware in the pan of cold soapy water in the sink.

"You know exactly, don't you Rube?" she said. You and them dogs. Ain't you ever going to get rid of 'em like you promised?"

"No, I guess I'm not. I'm surprised you ever thought I would; I love them dogs. Anyway, it's none o' your business an' I don't want to talk about it. I got chores to do and the dogs to feed

and exercise, then I got to get over to Cedar Lawn and fire up the backhoe. They got a couple more to plant, come Saturday." Reuben got up from the table, reached around Martha, poured his coffee in her dishwasher, which he knew would make her madder than ever, and dropped the cup in after. She leaned on the sink and looked steady out the window while he hitched up his bibbed overalls and left the kitchen through the door to the back porch.

Martha heard him clomp across the porch, then saw him going down the lane toward the barnlot gate. The grass in the back yard was long; they didn't mow it much now; and it was heavy-wet with the morning dew. The early sun, looking in her window, was promising her face another scorcher of a day to come. Reuben stopped short of the gate, stooped and plucked a stem of rye grass, which he stuck in his mouth as he stood up again. He stood there, hands in the overall pockets, squinting out over the barnlot toward the kennels by the barn. The dogs sensed him coming, and were giving out an occasional cough, anticipating breakfast. It was like he was posing for her; the retired gentleman farmer surveying his domain.

Martha took in Reuben in profile, her earlier anger sliding away. He was a good looking man, even at seventy-six, tall and straight as the gateposts he stood by that he had sunk himself when he was a boy. His hair was white now, but still all there, and the muscles bulged along his arms and under the white tee shirt where the shoulder straps of his overalls crossed over. Martha felt a twinge down in that secret place, and marveled again that he could do that to her. She was seventy herself now. She didn't get wet like she used to, and they didn't do it so often, but he would set out the White Rose Petroleum Jelly ever' once in a while, and that was their signal. There'd never been anyone but Reuben.

Martha remembered the first time. They were in the one room school and she was reading out loud to the others: her, Reuben, the teacher and five farm kids gathered around the Franklin stove in January and ten below zero outside the door. She was reading *Little Orphan Annie* by James Whitcomb Riley, who'd lived down in Greenfield, just across the Madison County Line. She remembered they'd all turn around in their chairs now and again, because it'd be hot-to-blazes on the side toward the pot-bellied stove and cold on the side away. Reuben kept touching her that day. When they moved their straight backed chairs he touched her knee. When she got up to get some more wood for the stove, Reuben helped, and he brushed against her; first in front, then in back. When she realized he was doing it on purpose the feeling started down in that secret place, and the wetness, too. Then she looked in his eyes, and she knew he knew, and she got short of breath and weak in the knees. She hadn't supposed that anyone knew about that place. She went to the outhouse long enough to calm down and catch her breath. Later they had both sneaked back to the schoolhouse after the teacher and the others were gone. There was still some heat from the cast iron stove, and they had done it with most of their clothes still on; partly because it was cold, and partly because they just couldn't wait. She'd been fourteen that first time, and he was twenty. How many times since in fifty-six years?

The sound of the dogs yowling and snapping brought her back from her reverie. Reuben had moved on while she daydreamed, and had luckily retrieved one of the last of the covered buckets

and was feeding the dogs. The sound made her a little sick to her stomach. They were Reuben's biggest weakness. They were his babies, the children they never had together. He had always kept a number of them, but in the last few years, since they had sold off most of the land to developers to pay the mortgage, and it had gotten so hard to make ends meet, he was always bringing home another one. There must be thirty by now. There was a time when just the cost of feeding the brutes had threatened to bankrupt them.

### III

Reuben climbed down from the backhoe and fished a red handkerchief from his pocket to mop his brow. It had been the brightest, hottest day of the week. He hunkered down in the shadow of one of the big rear tires and admired his handiwork: two perfect graves side by side. Four by eight by six feet deep. Now he had to go for the side loader and the dump truck so the earth wouldn't be there in a pile on Saturday to remind the family that it was going to be thrown on top of the casket. The guys from Rosenson's Mortuary where his brother Sam was part-time mortician would come by tomorrow, which was Thursday, to spread the ground covers, put up the canopies and so forth. "Lot of work getting folks buried," he thought. "No wonder they charge so much." The work order for two side by side was pretty unusual, but he wasn't about to complain. Two times ten dollars each was twenty bucks, and that would feed him and Martha for almost a week if they were careful.

After loading the dirt and moving the truck and the other equipment out to the sheds, he hosed down the backhoe and the sideloader, and stood for a minute with the hose pointed straight up over his head. The water broke up in the air and came down like a cool, clear rain on his head and around him, stirring up a smell like rain smells when it first hits the parched earth on a hot summer afternoon. Then he threw his black lunch box in the side window of the station wagon, scooted behind the wheel and drove away toward the funeral home.

### IV

Sam was going over the room one more time. He had, of course, hosed down after putting the body away in the cold drawer, and he'd cleaned up the knives and scalpels and saws. Giving the table a final wipe he sat down heavily on the bench along the wall and threw the rag in the laundry bag beside him. He reached the pack of Benson and Hedges Gold from his shirt pocket and shook one out, which he lit and took a long drag, blowing the smoke out through his nose. "I guess I'll be on that table or one like it before long," he thought. "I wonder if old Reuben'll be digging the hole to put me in." Sam had known for some time now that Death was growing in his chest, and he figured the cigarettes had started and fed the tumor. He was kind of glad that Mabel had gone on before and wasn't going to be around for his dying. Mabel had been gone now for seventeen years, and when she had died, things had been much better than they were now; there'd been more money. He'd still been employed full time, and Reuben'd still had the two hundred acres, all in corn and soybeans.

Sam took another long pull just as there came a knock on the side door. He got up and opened the locked door for Reuben, whom he'd been expecting.

"Hiya, Sam. Got any coffee?"

"Sure. You know I always make coffee when you're comin' Rube. Come on in. Make yourself comfortable."

"Who can be comfortable at an undertaker's? I don't see how you go on living here, Sam. Where's the bodies? I just dug two holes for 'em." Reuben sat heavily on the bench where Sam had been.

"Ain't but one. I just finished it up and put it in the drawer," Sam answered as he poured coffee from a pot on a sideboard. "The other one's for her old man who's been buried over at Middletown. Her kids want them together, and it's either put her over there, or bring him here. You know the Jessups? That's them. Her mother. She was old. Near as old as you, Rube." Sam chuckled and handed Reuben his cup of coffee.

"Up your's, Sam. Listen, they treatin' you alright?"

"Yeah. It ain't so bad. It's a good deal to get a little apartment full time together with some wages for as little work as there is." Sam sat down near Reuben on the bench, and balanced his mug on the knee of his khakis.

Reuben reached across and snagged the cigarettes from Sam's shirt pocket. "I'll have one of those," he said.

"Sure, go ahead. But they'll kill you Rube, you know that."

"Right. I don't see you tapering off. At least I quit except for when I come to see you. Makes me jealous when I come here and see you puffing away when I'm trying to quit. I'm four years older anyhow. I'm supposed to go first."

"Well keep it up. Maybe you will yet."

"Tell me, Sam. The lady that just died. Did you embalm her?"

"Had to. Three days old. Open casket. Summer weather. We didn't save nuthin' on this one."

"Him... Listen, Sam, another thing I been meanin' to ask. We filled up the last of those mausoleum drawers out to the cemetery last week. You know, the above ground ones where I slide 'em in, then cement the thing closed. Anybody plannin' on buildin' any more? I kind of like 'em. Pays the same and a lot less work."

"Actually, no," Sam answered. "Thought they'd have told you. There's not too much demand for 'em, and actually, they cost a lot more than diggin' graves. Have to charge more, and harder to get a profit."

"Well shit. That's goin' to make it hard," Reuben said. "I mean, I'll have to be diggin' all the time. Easier just to slip 'em in the slot and slap on the cement."

# V

Reuben drove the station wagon under the speed limit through Greenfield and toward Indianapolis on the Interstate. He didn't like driving on the Interstate, especially at two in the morning, and he sure didn't like spending the money for the gas. As he neared the Indianapolis city limits a few minutes later, he saw what he'd thought he might: a man trying to thumb a ride on the other side of the highway going back toward home. Reuben made the turns at the next cloverleaf and went back East toward where he'd seen the hitchhiker. As he drove he checked for the lead filled sap down by the seat beside him and glanced in the back at the rubberized body bag. No more mausoleum crypts was a toughie. Too much risk in diggin' up graves. Them dogs had to be fed.

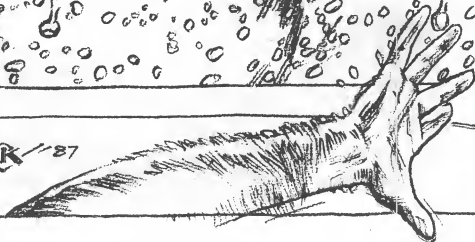
# VI

The grinder stuck again, and it took another strong yank to free it. The lantern sputtered. Using the knives and cleaver were as tiring as turning the crank, but this was better than rocking and watching. There were two to grind up, what with Reuben and the one he'd brought home with him. She had to do it. He'd have been caught sooner or later. This was the only way. With the two the dogs would eat for a couple of weeks. She figured Sam would be the first to come looking and she would have to do him too. Then she could tell folks that she supposed they'd gone off together. She'd even thought how to handle the dogs after. She'd do them one at a time and feed them to the others 'till just one was left. Then she'd bury that one. She was looking forward to that part. She hated those dogs.





DK 87



# The Edge Of Forever

by Anke Kriske

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IT WAS A cold night even for March. The wind shook the trees and occasionally buffeted the yellow VW driven by Laura Thomas. She was tired and rather wished she had postponed going down to see her best and oldest friend until Saturday morning after a good night's sleep. When she yawned for the third time in five minutes, Laura rolled down the window to let the cold air keep her alert as she struggled to focus her eyes on the patch of road illuminated by the headlights.

A man in a heavy jacket was walking -- no, limping -- at the side of the road.

Laura pulled up beside him and rolled the window down further. "Are you all right?"

The man walked to the side of the car and leaned over. He was in his late twenties, green eyes and pleasant features. There was something strange about him, but Laura couldn't put her finger on what it was. He seemed dazed -- and somehow vulnerable. "I noticed your limp and..."

"That is courtesy of my latest trip to Sugarloaf," he said. "And my car is about a mile up the road -- dead battery."

Ask him if I should call someone, she thought. "Where are you heading?"

"Stonington. To my folks."

"I'm going to Westerly. Would you like a ride?"

"You bet."

He slid into the seat beside her before she thoroughly realized what she had said. It wasn't like her to offer a ride to a stranger. Laura had the feeling that if she asked him to leave he would, but he seemed a nice enough man and it was a cold night. She drove back onto the pavement. After a mile of silence, he began to hum jingle bells under his breath. It annoyed Laura. "Were you out there long?" she asked to stop the humming.

"Oh, I don't know. Seems like weeks. It's this weather."

She glanced at him. "I can't wait for spring."

"Spring?" A deep line formed between his eyebrows. He looked outside the window. "Yeah. Winters are boring in southern New England. You get all the inconvenience of snow and none of the fun." He rubbed his gloved hands together. "You don't mind if I turn up the heat, do you? I feel like an ice cube."

"Go right ahead." Laura noticed that his skin didn't look right: it seemed blue. The cold no doubt. "Where do you work?"

"I don't, at least that's what my father says. I'm a free-lance artist and I teach art part-time to emotionally disturbed kids. I'll spare you the speech about what a rewarding job that is, although I have one prepared if you're interested."

"When do you find the time to ski?"

"I manage to get away. Usually to New Hampshire. I've got friends there from college."

"That's where my family is from."

"Does that mean you ski?" he asked, his interest obvious.

"It depends on what you think of cross-country."

"Too tame, not to mention a lot of hard work. Of course, you also don't get as many injuries." He looked down at his leg. "My ankle will never be the same again." he said with mock seriousness.

"What did you do?"

"Picture an experienced skier capable of handling any run, knowing them all because he used to work in the resorts during school breaks. Then picture the same guy falling out of a ski lift trying to get on." He shook his head. "The attendant said he'd never seen anyone get skis in precisely that position before."

Laura smiled. "That must have been awful."

"My friends applauded the fall. They scored it, the way they do for the Olympics. They gave me an 8.5 for execution and a 9.5 for originality. Personally, I thought the judging was biased and I deserved more." He grinned. "And what brings you to the greater Stonington-Westerly area? You're not a member of the Polar Bear Club and want to go swimming in the refreshing ocean waters?"

"No, thank you. I'm here to visit my friend, Jean DeBevoise."

"The name's familiar. She doesn't live on Potter Hill, does she? Her husband's name is Harry?"

Laura nodded.

"Harry was a year ahead of me in high school. I haven't seen him in ages; in fact, he may not even remember my name, Greg Saunders." He looked at the scenery flitting past. "We're here already. You don't know how I appreciate being picked up. I was beginning to think that I was going to have to spend Christmas on the road."

Laura gripped the wheel tightly. "Christmas?"

He didn't notice the change in her. "That two story red house on the right," he continued in a conversational tone, "that's the one that belongs to my parents."

He grabbed the dashboard. "Stop. Stop!"

Laura hit the brakes.

"I can't go there. I have to..." He bolted from the car.

Laura shifted into park and unfastened the seat belt. By the time she looked, he was gone. "Where the devil could he have run so fast?" The lights were on at the house. "I'd better find out what's going on, or it'll drive me crazy all weekend."

She walked up to the door and rang the bell, then waited impatiently as the wind penetrated her gray business suit and pulled her shoulder-length auburn hair across her face. The house, built at

the turn of the century, was well-kept, with snow-white lace curtains hanging in the windows.

A tall, balding man wearing a baggy gray sweater opened the door. He peered at Laura through horn rimmed glasses.

"Excuse me, are you Mr. Saunders?"

"Yes, I am. What's the matter?"

"I'm not really sure. I picked up your son this evening -- he said his car broke down -- and when we got here he just ran away. He doesn't seem coherent..."

"Is this some sort of sick joke?" he snapped.

"My son is in the hospital. In a coma." He started to shut the door.

"Wait." Laura quickly put her hand against the door. "I'm sorry," she stammered. "If it is a joke, it's been played on me. The man said his name was Greg Saunders. He had a limp he said he got at Sugarloaf. He thought it was Christmas."

"Greg's car broke down Christmas Eve. Someone ran him over and left him. The weekend before, Greg had gone skiing. He'd hurt his ankle."

"A fall from the lift he told me."

He inhaled sharply, as if someone had hit him. "Can you come inside for a moment?" Not giving her a chance to decline, he pulled her through the hallway and into the warm living room where a plump, gray-haired woman sat in a recliner, watching TV.

"Henry?"

Henry Saunders ignored her, went to the mantel over the unused fireplace and took down a large photo. "This is my son."

Laura studied the photo. A man dressed in a t-shirt and shorts smiled at her. "I can't be positive, but it looks like him." Laura sank onto the couch. "He wore a heavy green jacket. No hat. Leather gloves." She saw the disbelief in his eyes. "Look, I'm not making this up." She fumbled through her purse. "I'm a sales representative for a computer company. This is my I.D. I wouldn't be telling you these things if they hadn't happened. The man was walking by the side of the road -- just after the railroad crossing -- he," she searched her memory for some detail that would convince him, "he must have cut himself shaving, just under the left side of his jaw."

"Oh, my God!" Henry Saunders collapsed next to her. "Eleanor, call the hospital, find out if Greg's all right."

The woman, not knowing what was going on, went into the kitchen and came back a few minutes later to report that there was no change. At that point Laura repeated her story.

"Obviously you couldn't have met him," Mrs. Saunders said, pacing back and forth, fighting the desire to chew on nails that had already been bitten down to the quick.

Laura crossed her arms defensively. "I can't explain it either, but how could I know what he looked like, what he was wearing?"

Mrs. Saunders stopped meandering through the living room. "Maybe your friend Jean told you and you imagined it?" she suggested. "You did say you were tired. The mind can play tricks on you."

"The paper didn't mention the cut on his jaw," Mr. Saunders said quickly to his wife. "He mentioned it to me when he called to let us know when he would be down. The paper also didn't mention the exact location where he was found. Just the route number."

"Jean could have heard it from someone; you know what this town is like. Otherwise, it doesn't make sense."

"For a second," Mr. Saunders said, and took a

deep breath, "I thought it meant that Greg had died. That it was..."

"Don't even say it," Mrs. Saunders countered, her voice breaking, "I don't want to think about it. Greg's going to be fine. He has to be."

She left them and went into the kitchen -- to cry Laura thought. "I should be going," Laura said. "I'm really sorry to have come."

"Yes. Certainly." He looked perplexed and suddenly very old. "Perhaps it was someone else, after all."

\*\*\*

Two weeks later, Laura was driving back on the same route to visit Jean. Laura wasn't tired, it wasn't as late, and she was in a good mood after having gotten a hefty raise earlier in the day. As she rounded the bend of the road, her lights illuminated a man walking.

Or rather limping.

"My God," she whispered. She pulled the car over to the shoulder. It was the same man who came to the car. "Hi," her voice was shaky, "do you need a ride?"

"You bet." The same voice. He quickly got in beside her. "I'm heading for Stonington. To my folks."

"I'm going to Westerly." He doesn't remember me, she thought, as she studied him. "What happened to your car?"

"My battery went dead. About a mile back."

He began to hum jingle bells under his breath. "I feel like I've been out there for weeks." He rubbed his gloved hands together. "You don't mind if I turn up the heat, do you? I feel like an ice cube."

"Go right ahead." Her voice sounded an octave higher than usual. Think about driving, she told herself, and keep calm, pretend there's nothing unusual about this. "Are you going home from work?"

"I don't work, at least that's what my father says. I work..."

"...as a free-lance artist, and you also teach emotionally disturbed kids." She hadn't meant to say it, the words just burst out.

"How did you know that?" He turned toward her. "Have we met before?"

"Two weeks ago, Greg."

"Oh? I'm sorry, I don't remember you."

"You told me about the skiing accident, that's why you're limping."

His eyes widened. "I was at Sugarloaf -- last week."

She shook her head. "That was last year. It's almost April."

He stiffened. "I think you better let me out."

"Greg, I picked you up two weeks ago on the same route. You told me that you were trying to get home to your parents for Christmas."

"Let me out of the car. Please."

"Can you remember the conversation we had? You told me about yourself, about your friends scoring your fall from the ski lift."

There was panic in his eyes. He looked like he was tempted to grab the wheel. "Fine. O. K." He wedged himself against the car door so that he could look at her and the road at the same time. "Let me ask you something. What's the weather like?"

"Getting warm, the grass is beginning to come up. Obviously I'm not wearing heavy clothing. What do you see?"

"Well, you're wearing jeans and a thin pink sweater, but it's warm in the car. Outside, it's cold. The trees are whipping around in the wind. It snowed a bit a couple of days ago, but the roads are clear."

"Greg, your parents told me that you're in a hospital. You were hit by a car on Christmas eve." She jumped when he tapped her shoulder.

"If I were in a hospital, I couldn't do that, could I?"

"I can't pretend to guess at the answers. Your spirit, your soul, whatever, isn't attached to your body."

"I feel pretty solid to me -- just as solid as this car, as you are."

"Where are your Christmas presents? You'd be bringing them with you."

He patted his jacket pocket. "Reservations for a Caribbean cruise in the summer. My parents have never gone on a big trip, so I've been saving up for five years to send them there." They entered Stonington. "Here we are, my parents' house is the red one on the right." His face contorted. "Stop the car. Stop, I've got to get out!"

Laura wasn't about to, but he wrenched the wheel from her, so she was forced to slam on the brakes. He bolted. She tried to follow, but he was already gone by the time she reached the sidewalk.

"Are you nuts or something?" a man on a motorcycle shouted. "Why the hell did you do that? I almost ran into you."

"Did you see the man run away from my car?"

"What?! No one got out except you." The cyclist peeled away from her.

Laura looked at the passenger door. It was locked. And yet she couldn't recall unlocking it for Greg to get inside.

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"It's so hard to explain," Laura told Mr. and Mrs. Saunders over a cup of cooling coffee. "It's almost as if I'm being sucked into whatever reality Greg sees. I could have sworn that he opened the door of the car, and yet at the same time, in retrospect, it seems that he didn't."

Mrs. Saunders looked at the tickets lying in front of her on the kitchen table. "No one knew about them. It was what he promised us years ago, when he was a teenager." Tears began to run down her face.

Mr. Saunders patted her hand. "We'll go looking for him, Eleanor."

"You drive that way to work. You've never seen him," she said, dabbing the tears with an already wet handkerchief.

"He might only appear late at night," Laura said. "Or to someone he doesn't know. Wouldn't that make sense? He's trying so very hard to get home. His thoughts are still on the road, wondering if anyone would pass to pick him up. His friends and family would all be at home, so he's expecting a stranger."

"He has to know he was in an accident," Mr. Saunders said.

"It happened too fast," Laura suggested, "and his mind didn't have time to register the information. I seem to recall reading that people who sustain a brain injury don't remember what happened in the final seconds before they lost consciousness."

"But what do we do about it?" Mrs. Saunders demanded. "We can't leave him there. There has to be a way to get him back into his body."

"What if it kills him?" Mr. Saunders asked her. "If we left well enough alone he might be all right in time."

His wife got up from the hardbacked chair and started to pace around the kitchen. "Laura, what do you think we should do?" she asked abruptly.

"Me? I don't know."

"You're the only one Greg's had contact with, at least as far as we know. Maybe there's something special about you."

"I don't really think so. The best I could do was to try to bring him here, but he can't seem to come this far -- I wonder if I took him in the opposite direction, if that would do anything. What was the exact location of the accident?"

Mr. Saunders drew a map with his fingers on the kitchen table. "When you pass the railroad tracks, there's the field on your right. It has a low, crumbling stone wall. There's a section missing where a tree once grew. It's been cut down, but you can still see part of the trunk. That's where it happened."

Laura looked at her watch. It was nine. "I'm going to give Jean a call and tell her to leave the door unlocked for me; then I'm going to try to see if I can find Greg." She rested her chin on her hand. "I remember playing with my cousins when I was about five. We were in this corn field. They were older and knew their way through the shortcut we were taking. Suddenly they were gone and I realized how big the plants were, and I couldn't see anything else, or hear anything other than the rustle of stalks brushing against each other. And I knew the field went on and on, to the edge of forever. The whole world was green, and I was the only person in it. I started to run for home, where my parents and sisters were, but no matter where I turned there were green plants and more green plants. Nothing changed no matter how far I ran or how hard I cried. I was so afraid that I would never get home, but I had to keep trying, because I was convinced that no one would ever be able to find me. It was almost nightfall before I was found -- by my uncle. After all those years I've never forgotten that feeling. I don't like to think of Greg traveling that road, month after month, while his life slips away."

\*\*\*

The night had cooled considerably by the time Laura was back on the highway. She had pulled on her jacket and turned up the heater. She crossed the railroad tracks and drove along the stone wall. A car passed her. Suddenly he appeared.

She pulled up behind him and rolled down her window. "Hi. Got a problem?"

"Sure do. My car's battery went dead about a mile back."

"I've got jumper cables in the car. We could try to start yours."

He looked at the car critically. "I don't know if that's a good idea."

"I will have you know I've got the best battery that money can buy in this car. Hop in."

He didn't answer. He turned his head and looked toward Stonington, then he shrugged. "I guess it's worth a shot, if you don't mind." He got in beside her. "I'm glad you came along. I was beginning to feel like an ice cube. Do you mind if I turn up the heater?"

"Go right ahead. I've really got bad vision at night," she said -- it wasn't true -- turning the VW around, "so you'd better give me plenty of warning when we're near your car."

They drove for a mile. "We're almost there. Slow down. The car's right up ahead. There isn't much room to park." He grabbed the dashboard. "Hey, Stop! You weren't kidding about having bad eyesight. You almost hit my car."

Laura couldn't see a car, but she could see the tree stump only a few yards away. They both went outside. Greg opened the hood of her car and began to disentangle the cable. She watched him for a moment. "Greg." She laid a hand on his shoulder. He felt of flesh and blood. "Greg, it won't work."

He turned to her.

"If you'll come with me I'll try to explain." She led him to the tree trunk. He stopped a couple of feet short. "Greg, what day is this?"

"You are kidding, aren't you? It's December 24th."

"No. You were walking home on the 24th when you were hit by a car. You were found here where I'm standing." She went over it again, explaining the accident, their two previous meetings. Even in the dark she could sense his tension.

"I'm supposed to believe that?"

"Can you stand here, where I am?"

"I don't see any reason to," he replied, pulling up the collar of his jacket. "I'll just get home on my own steam now."

Laura grabbed his arm to keep him from leaving. "You can't! You're in a hospital. This spot is where you were found, unconscious, bones broken, bleeding. I don't think you can stand here because this is where you almost died."

He stepped right up to her. "Does this prove anything?" His voice was soft and understanding, his breath warm against her face.

"I was hoping it would. And you needn't talk to me as if I were one of your students. Greg, you've been walking this road for months."

"It's December."

"I'm not wearing gloves. My hands aren't cold, are they? I'm not shivering -- I'm not wearing a winter coat. Listen to me, please. If you came with me to the hospital and saw yourself, that might, ah, might make you reintegrate. You can't stay here, reliving a small part of your life over and over." Her voice started to sound desperate even to her own ears. "Please listen to me."

"Hey, come on, it's all right." He took her in his arms, as if he were comforting a hysterical child. "I don't know what's going on, how you know so much about me, but you're imagining that you've met me before."

She could hear him breathe, feel his chest rise and fall. "Greg, I..."

A car came towards them quickly. Greg glanced at it, his face white in the bright light. He threw Laura backwards.

"Greg!" Laura screamed. But the car was already gone. Laura got up from the ground. Greg was just standing there. She couldn't see his face.

"Light. I remember a light. It was coming at me much faster." He held a hand to her and she took it. "Laura what's happening?" He was panting. He collapsed. "I can't, can't see. Home, I want to go home."

"No!" Laura cradled his head, her hands felt wet from blood. "It's not home that you're trying to get to. It's the hospital. You're lying in a bed. Christmas is over. There'll be other Christmases. Go to the hospital!"

He gripped her arm, his fingers digging through the jacket, the sweater, into her flesh.

She could smell antiseptic. He was dragging her with him! She stared at her car. A blast of wintry air shook her. She was falling, falling through a white void, and there was nothing to grab, nothing that would stop the slide away from her car and her life. Images reeled in confusion. She didn't even know if they were hers or Greg's. White snow, powder.

"I won't go down the hill," she heard herself saying. "Across, through the woods, through the corn." She was on skis, panting, moving her arms and legs in unison with smooth, brisk strides. The trees were so tall, she couldn't see the sun. It was night. Stars were out. Lights. Headlights. Darkness, empty, painful darkness. "It can't go on forever. The field has to end and when it ends I'll be home."

Trees sped by. A spray of powder behind her. "I won't go down!" she screamed. She threw herself into a snowbank. "That's a 9.5 for originality," someone shouted amid laughter.

"I've got to go across." Her ankle hurt. "I've got to reach home." The trails branched. "Which way is home?" She was crying. The corn was so high. "I've got to find my home." The cold wind bit into her as the blizzard descended.

"If you're ever lost again you are to stay put," her mother admonished in Mrs. Saunders's kitchen.

"I'm Laura. I'm on the road. I've got to be on a road. And it's dark. It's night. I just got a raise today and I should be out celebrating with Jean."

"I'm Laura," she mumbled, aware that she was kneeling. Alone. All her nails had broken when she dug them into the ground. She couldn't stop shaking. Even though she was soaked with sweat she felt cold.

Greg! What had happened to him?

Laura rose stiffly and staggered to the car. She started up the engine and drove much too quickly to Stonington. From a block away, she could see that all the lights were on in the house. In her haste, she ran one wheel up against the curb, raced from the car without closing the door and up the three steps. Mr. Saunders opened the door before she could ring the bell.

"Greg woke up!" he shouted jubilantly. He picked Laura up and swung her around the hallway. "He woke up twenty minutes ago!" He put her down to wipe the tears from his eyes. "Funny, he woke up mumbling something about cross country skiing."

Mrs. Saunders, dressed to go out, came down the stairs. "What happened to you, Laura?"

She collapsed on the ornamental bench in the hallway. "I guess you could say that I brought Greg home."

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## DESTINATION

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Dragons flames entwining memories  
dreams of ghosts playing a singed flute  
in my ear.

If spectral notes ignite  
them, what shaded memory is lost in sleep?  
The dark ones of fantasy knew their art  
was of buried things floating out of graves  
and I only yesterday caught the tune.

-- Gary William Crawford





*News and views of Small Press Publications,  
Organizations, and People by IRWIN M. CHAPMAN*

JUST AS I LOVE a good twist at the end of a story, so do I love uncanny surprises in real life. Were I writing fiction, no one would believe the coincidences that have happened recently. Truth is, indeed, stranger than fiction...

Surprise #1: Jeffrey Osier, one of the best new writers in our genre, lives less than six blocks from me. I didn't know this fact when I told Mark Rainey, editor of *Deathrealm*, that Jeff Osier's stories in *Deathrealm 1*, *Deathrealm 2*, and *Deathrealm 3* showed exceptional promise. I learned that Jeff was nearly a next-door neighbor only after he sent 2AM a subscription and Gretta casually mentioned that Jeff and I had addresses so similar that she nearly got us mixed up in her computer file.

Surprise #2: Jeffrey Osier's tale in *Deathrealm 4*, "Snowlight" is one of the few tales I've read in the small press that works well on multiple levels. It's the kind of complex tale I look for in commercial fiction (and seldom find). Read "Snowlight" and see if you don't agree.

Surprise #3: The rest of the stories in *Deathrealm 4* are almost as good as "Snowlight." Besides stories by Colleen Drrippé, Ed Shamon, David Starkey, William Rasmussen, Joey Froehlich and Paul Dale Anderson, there are poems by Froehlich, Wayne Allen Sallee, Steven K. Mitchell, Dwight E. Humphries, Glenn Sheldon, Shawn Ramsey, John Powers and Kim Neidigh. Illos are by Jim Garrison, Rodger Gerberding, Mike Odden, Jeffrey Osier, Ted Piwowar and editor Rainey. Reviews by Roger Dale Trexler and Ed Shamon. Professionally typeset, saddle stitched, offset. All for only \$3.00. One hell of a deal.

*Deathrealm* subscriptions are \$11.00 for 4 issues from Mark Rainey, 3223-F Regents Park, Greensboro, NC 27405.

Surprise #4: I'd been reading in *THE COSMOPOLITAN* Newsletter about the controversy surrounding Richard D. Reynolds' *CRY FOR WAR*, the true story of Suzan and Michael Carson. *CRY FOR WAR* (Squibb Press, \$7.95 quality paper, ISBN 0-9618577-2-2, 368 pages, illustrated) is a journalistic attempt to understand the personalities and activities of two self-proclaimed assassins who believed that God had ordered them to kill witches, homosexuals and abortionists (and Ronald Wilson Reagan, whom they believed to be the Devil in disguise). Here's a case where truth is far scarier than fiction.

But even scarier than the Carsons themselves (who were certainly certifiably insane) is the fact that a California book printer refused to manufacture this non-fiction book by a reputable small press publisher because the printer found the material personally offensive (calling the book "raunchy" and "unacceptable").

Imagine my surprise then when I received a printed copy of the book for review (Squibb Press

took the book to Delta Lithograph who did an excellent job on printing and binding [Delta, by the way, is owned by the same European communications conglomerate that recently bought Doubleday]), and I read every word twice, searching diligently for the "raunchy" parts, but I couldn't find any!

Sure, the book is filled with crazy ideas. Sure, there are journalistic descriptions of bizarre "Manson-type" murders. Sure, the author depicts religious zealots as psychos or drug-crazed (and half-starved) weirdos.

But the book is not "raunchy."

Though not as well-written as Capote's *IN COLD BLOOD*, the approach is certainly similar. Reynolds did his homework, researched a major contribution to the study of psychological aberration (religious fanaticism), and gave us a book that reads like a cross between a horror novel and an issue of *The National Enquirer*.

I recommend *CRY FOR WAR* to any serious reader or writer of psychological horror. Call BOOKPEOPLE at 800-227-1516 to find a store near you that stocks *CRY FOR WAR*. Or write to Squibb Press, Inc., PO Box 421523, San Francisco, CA 94142.

Surprise #5: *Nightmares: Excursions Into Darkness #1*, published by Scott A. Becker, PO Box 9156, Helena, MT 59601. A new entry into the small press horror scene, *Nightmares* is quite nicely done. Two stories stand out: "The Bargain" by Jeff Johnston and "Bodily Fluids" by Sherrie Brown. Other stories include "Professionals" by Rick Garrett, "Sarah" by Dana L. Martin, "Golden Years" by Chris B. Lacher, "Seven Year Itch" by Michael O. Coulter, "Bristol Down" by R. L. Brockett, and "Dog Eat Dog" by Darin White. Barry Brandon's cover illo and his design for "Splatter Chatter with Sushi Sphincter" are brilliant pieces of gut-wrenching art (reminiscent of "Ghastly" Graham Ingles' work for EC). Send \$4.00 for a single issue, \$14.00 for a full year (4 issues) to *Nightmares: Excursions Into Darkness*, PO Box 9156, Helena, MT 59601. You'll be glad you did.

Surprise #6: *Borderland* lives! Though I hadn't seen a new issue of this excellent Dark Fantasy magazine for nearly a year, Publisher/Managing Editor Raymond Alexander surprised me at the World Fantasy Convention in Nashville by releasing a special Hugh B. Cave issue that's a true collector's item. *Borderland*'s layouts and graphics have always impressed me. But this special issue is something to behold!

I'm glad to hear that *Borderland* survives. Alexander gives us this "brief word regarding the whereabouts of the long-awaited fifth issue. To those who have doubted us we say: O ye of little faith! To those whose patience has been a virtue we say: after many hardships and reverses, *Borderland* is coming, sooner than Christmas. More than this, next year we shall publish two issues in an expanded format of 48 pages. The *Borderland* tradi-

tion of excellence continues. Bear with us, the best is yet to come."

I eagerly await future issues of this fine Canadian production. Write to Artimus Publications, 7305 Woodbine Ave, Suite 517, Markham, Ontario, Canada L3R 3W7 for current price and subscription information.

**Surprise #7:** There are an almost infinite number of small press "literary" and "scholarly" publications supported in whole or part by arts councils or universities. Beginning next issue, ZAM will expand its review coverage by including a special section on what scholars term "little" magazines. Why? Because a growing number of the "little" magazines are now including fantasy and sf in their pages.

In fact, *The Mage: A Journal of Fantasy and Science Fiction* -- published semestery with funding from the Colgate University Student Association -- is ALL fantasy and sf. And it's got excellent stories, fine artwork, and exceptional poetry by some of same people you find contributing to ZAM, *Grue*, *The Horror Show*, and other "commercial" small press publications. Single copies are \$3.50 ppd. Subscriptions are \$6.00 for 1 year (2 issues). Order from *The Mage*, c/o The Student Association, Colgate University, Hamilton, NY 13346.

Another fine university publication is *The Rhetorician*, edited by none other than Dr. John B. Rosenman. Surprise! This is the same John B. Rosenman who wrote "When A Rose Sings" for ZAM and "Feed Us A Live Insect" for *Portents* and dozens of other fine stories for the genre magazines. Though only sixteen pages, *The Rhetorician* is beautifully done. Send financial contributions to Dr. John B. Rosenman, c/o The Department of English & Foreign Languages, Norfolk State University, 2401 Corpew Ave., Norfolk, VA 23504. Level of Support: Patron Saint - \$100; Patron - \$50; Sponsor - \$25; Supporter - \$10; Friend - \$5. Literary and artistic contributions should be sent to the same address, but please enclose a self-addressed, stamped envelope if you want your contribution returned. Check with Dr. Rosenman to see if contributions are accepted from non-students since this is an official publication of the English Club of Norfolk State University and special rules may apply (include a SASE with inquiries).

*Painted Bride Quarterly* is published four times a year by Painted Bride Art Center, 230 Vine St, Philadelphia, PA 19106 with funding support by The Pennsylvania Council On the Arts and the City of Philadelphia. Subscriptions are \$12 per year, \$20 for 2 years. This is a professionally produced, perfect bound book that's so well-done that I almost cried because ZAM can't afford the same production values. Issue #31 is pure poetry (with photographs of Jazz greats interspersed). Greg Geleta's poems are the best of the bunch, but all the contributions are well-worth reading. Joel Redon's "Moon of Chouval" touched a particular spot in my psyche and very delicately moved the mountain that's my heart. And James Cory's essay on James Dean, "Fairmount: A Fan's Notes" made me remember things I'd thought long forgotten. I recommend *Painted Bride Quarterly* to anyone who loves contemporary literature.

**Surprise # 8:** *Minnesota Fantasy Review I*. Ed Shannon and Mike Odden have put together a dynamite new publication that's sure to rival anything on the market within the next few years. This first issue, though dot-matrix typeset, has horrific art by Joe West, Lee Odden, Mat Rouch, Jim Boden, Marge Simon, Jon Arfstrom, Rodger

Gerberding, Mike Walz and editor Mike Odden. Fiction includes works by Mark Rainey, Dave Stall, Glenn Rahman, Mary Elizabeth Counselman, Roger Dale Trexler, Matt McGregor, Carl Jacobi, and editor Shannon. Poetry's by Andy Decker, Carl Jacobi, Audrey Parente, Phillip Rainbird, Marge Simon, Scott Wyatt and Ruth Berman. Dave page has an excellent article on "Hawthorne and Mailer," John Brower writes about music and film in "Harmony of Fear," Marge Simon investigates "Sense of Wonder" and editor Shannon reviews books in "Internal Shadows." It's a nice first effort and worth the \$5.00 plus \$1.00 postage and handling. Two issue subscriptions are \$9.00 to Minnesota Fantasy Review, Ed Shannon and Mike Odden, Rt 2 Box 132, Avon, MN 56310.

**Surprise #9:** *Eldritch Tales #14* came out right on time for a change. Editor Burnham said he'd do it. And he did!

*Eldritch Tales* has been one of the most consistently inconsistent publications in the genre. Though the quality of fiction, poetry, art and articles is indisputably among the best in the small press, the frequency of publication has left subscribers and contributors alike wondering if the magazine was still in business. I'm happy to report that *Eldritch Tales: A Magazine in the Weird Tales Tradition* is definitely both alive and well.

Issue #14 is beautifully done using a Macintosh Plus desktop publishing system. Perfect bound and professionally printed, ET #14 features 116 pages of top-flight fantasy. "The Seed" by Roy Schneider is a brilliant short story that hasn't left me alone since I read it (never again will I wish my children, even in jest, to "poof"). William Relling, Jr. tells an excellent tale titled "Where Does Watson Road Go?" And James Anderson's "Deathstroke" is a haunting tale of artistic compulsion that's truly superb. Other contributors include J. N. Williamson, C. J. Henderson, John Buettner, Leonard Carpenter, Lawrence Harding, Donald Franson, Gary A. Braunbeck, Chris Lacher, Sam Gafford, C. Bruce Hunter, Steve Rasnic Tem, Herbert Jerry Baker, Stephen Studach, Scott E. Green, Frederick J. Meyer, Robert R. Medcalf, Jr., Charles L. Baker and Steve Eng. Artists this issue are Denis Tiani, Allen Koszowski, Jason Eckhardt, John Borkowski, James Garrison, Chris Pelletiere, Alfred Klosterman and Dave Stall. \$6.00 a copy or \$20.00 for 4 issues. Order from Crispin Burnham, *Eldritch Tales*, 1051 Wellington Rd, Lawrence, KS 66044.

The following publications are no surprise. They're consistently good, amazingly regular in schedule, and feature some of the best fantasy around.

**FANTASY & TERROR and FANTASY MACABRE** are both edited by Jessica Amanda Salmonson and published by Richard H. Fawcett. Ms. Salmonson is the only person I know (other than perhaps myself) who keeps a fine eye on the literary values of fantasy fiction and speaks out on behalf of the developing artist as well as the well-developed. How she finds the time to read as widely in mainstream literature as genre literature, I'll never know. But, incredibly, she's also found the time to develop herself into a fine novelist, short story writer and poet to boot; and she still finds time to edit anthologies for The Strange Company, the *TALES BY MOONLIGHT* anthologies, her well-known S & S anthologies, and also put together two regularly produced small press magazines! How does she do it all? Maybe someday she'll tell us!

**FANTASY & TERROR** is a poetry magazine. Issue

#9 includes both classic and contemporary poems by modern masters like Darwin Chismar, Gary William Crawford, Susan Lillas Wiggs, Joseph Payne Brennan, Walter Shedlofsky, Billy Wolfenbarger, Robert Frazier, and editor Salmonson herself and such past masters as Walt Whitman, Ambrose Bierce, Thomas Hardy and Virgil Finlay. Rich in imagery, rhythm and rhyme, these gems sparkle like diamonds. If you appreciate poetry, you'll love **FANTASY & TERROR**.

**FANTASY MACABRE** is primarily a prose collection, though Jessica often finds it difficult to separate prose from poetry (there's a touch of the poet in all great prose, isn't there?) in either of these magazines or even in her own writings. And **Fantasy Macabre** is primarily a ghost collection about things that go "Boomp" in the night, things "walten" in the shadows, things bidding time in a mountain laurel hell till summoned forth by the trumpet of armageddon, things that...well, see for yourself. Order a copy of **Fantasy Macabre #8** from Richard H. Fawcett, 61 Teecommas Drive, Uncasville, CT 06382 for only \$3.25 (\$9.00 for a three-issue subscription). And when you get your copy, save "Amelia" by James B. Hamesath to read last. It's got such a devilishly wicked ending!

**Sycophant** and **Alpha Adventures** are chapbooks similar to Fawcett's **Fantasy & Terror**, **Fantasy Macabre** and **Doppelganger** in price and format, but there the similarities seem to end (though there are Booby G. Warner stories in both **Fantasy Macabre #8** and **Sycophant #4**). Editor Scott Virtes is less literary and more visual in his presentation, and the stories he picks seem more modern and faster paced than Jessica's selections. Readers raised on television and videos may find Virtes' publications more to their tastes; readers raised on literature may appreciate the Salmonson-Fawcett publications more. Personally, I enjoy both.

One of the values of the small press is providing a home for a variety of themes and styles that simply don't fit the common denominators of commercial mass-market publications. By simply picking and choosing from among the fine fare of small press delicacies, one can please any palate and satisfy virtually any taste. For example: if

you like science fiction, try **Alpha Adventures #16**. But beware. This isn't the type of sf you'll find in Asimov's or Analog!

"Caz" by Colleen Drappé is good enough to have appeared in either Asimov's or Analog, but simply isn't the type of thing their current editors are accepting. It's the kind tale that Planet Stories might have done had that venerable pulp lasted into the eighties. "Piasa" by D. S. Rubenstein is a story F&SF would surely have snatched up had their editors seen it first (and a story that deserves to be picked up and reprinted in one of the "Year's Best" anthologies). And "Through Different Eyes" by Kleo Paterson is uniquely different and comes close to being a cyberpunk story but isn't quite.

**Alpha Adventures** is \$2.50 ppd or \$8.00 for a 4-issue sub from S. C. Virtes, Suite 348, 12322 Poway Rd, Poway, CA 92064. **Sycophant** is \$3.50 ppd or \$11.00 for 4 issues.

**Haunts (Tales of Unexpected Horror and the Supernatural)** is a double issue again to make up for unexpected delays in its schedule. #9/10 (Fall 87) is beautifully done with a bevy of fine stories by Andy Honeycutt, Michael C. McPherson, Rudy Kremberg, William Grabowski, Katherine Salts, B. J. Seidenstein, S. B. Dieckman, H. J. Cording, Mike Hurley, Cab Taylor and Richard Louis Newman, Kevin Speirs, S. M., Secula, Beverly Brunelle, and Joe Clifford Faust; and a single poem, "Remembering Medea" by Brett Rutherford. My personal favorite in this issue is Mike Hurley's "Witchwood," a haunting (no pun intended) little tale of deformity and dead limbs.

Order **Haunts** from Nightshade Publications, PO Box 3342, Providence, RI 02906. Single copies are \$3.25. Five issue subscriptions are \$13.00.

Surprise! I'm out of space already and haven't even touched on half of what I wanted to cover this time around. Since Jerry Williamson reviewed Bruce Boston's poetry and John MacLay's stories in The Dark Corner, Gretta asked me to save my own reviews of those works until 2 Seconds to 2 debuts next summer. So, see you next issue -- same place, same time -- for more thrill-packed surprises from the world of the small press!





# Estoppel

by Bentley Little

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MOST PEOPLE ASSUME I am mute without asking. I never tell them otherwise. If anyone does ask, I simply hand him one of the "mute" cards I had printed up for just such a reason and which I always carry with me. "Peace!" the cards say. "Smile! I am a Deaf Mute."

Most people assume as well that I am a derelict. I dress in old, filthy, raggedy clothes, I seldom bathe, and I do not comb my hair or trim my beard. I noticed, over a period of years, that people do not ordinarily talk to derelicts, that they go out of their way to avoid such people, and I became one for that reason.

I have done everything possible to minimize my human contacts and to keep people from speaking to me or addressing me in any way.

I have not uttered a single intelligible word since 1960.

I know that, for all intents and purposes, I am a mute, but I have never been able or willing to make it official. I have refrained from saying the word. I should have proclaimed years ago, "I am mute." But that would be permanent. It would be irreversible.

I guess I've been afraid.

To be honest, there is very little of which I am not afraid. I have spent half of my life being afraid. For nearly a decade, I was afraid to write anything down. I could neither speak nor write. What if, I thought, it happens with writing as well as speaking?

But those years, those ten long years of almost total isolation, were sheer and utter hell. I did not realize how important communication was to me until it was denied. And after a decade of such isolation, I literally could not take it anymore. It was driving me mad. So one night, my blood running high with adrenalin and bottled courage, I decided to take the chance. I locked the door of my motel room, shut the curtains, sat down in front of the desk and wrote on a blank sheet of paper: "I am black."

My hand did not change color as I finished the last arm of the "K." Neither did my other hand. I rushed to the mirror: neither had my face. God, the joy, the sheer exquisite rapture with which that simple sentence filled me! I danced around the room like a madman. I wrote all night.

I still write prolifically to this day and have had several fiction pieces published in assorted literary magazines under various pseudonyms. I have six unpublished novels sitting in my desk drawer.

But I am not a snob. I write anything and to anyone. Once a day, I make it a point to write to a business and complain about one of their products. You'd be surprised at the responses I get. I've received free movie passes, free hamburger coupons, several rebate checks and a huge amount

of apologetic letters.

And of course I have several pen pals. They are the closest thing I have to friends. My best friend, Phil, is a convict in San Quentin. He murdered his brother-in-law and was sentenced to life imprisonment. I would never want to meet the man on the street, but I have found through his letters that he can be a deeply sensitive individual. Out of all my pen pals, he best understands what it is like to be isolated, alienated, alone. I also write to a middle-aged woman named Joan, in France, a young girl named Nikol, in Belgium, and a small boy named Rufus in Washington D.C.

I have not told any of them the truth.

But how can I? I do not really know what "the truth" is myself.

The first experience occurred when I was twelve. At least, that's the first instance I remember. We were playing, my cousin Jobe and I in the unplowed and untended field in back of my grandmother's farm. We had just finished a furious game of freeze-ball tag and were running like crazy through what seemed like acres of grass, racing to the barn. The grass was tall, almost above my head, and I had to keep straining my neck and jumping up to see where I was going.

I did not see the rock I tripped over.

I must have blacked out for a few seconds, because I found myself lying on the ground, staring at an endless forest of grass stalks. I stood up, stunned and hurt, and started walking toward the barn where I knew Jobe was waiting, a self-satisfied winner's smile on his face.

I must have hit my head harder than I'd thought, because I kept walking and walking, and still did not reach the clearing and the barn. Instead, the grass kept getting thicker and taller, and soon I was lost in it. I did not even know in which direction I was travelling.

With the bump on my head still throbbing and with my heart starting to pound at the prospect of being lost in the grass, I decided to call for help. "Jobe!" I cried loudly, cupping my hands to my mouth to amplify the sound. "I'm lost!"

I heard Jobe's older, mocking laughter from an indeterminate direction.

"I mean it!" I called. "Help!"

Jobe giggled now. "Yeah," he called back. "The barn's a tough one to find."

By now I was ready to burst into tears. "MOM!"

"She can't hear you," Jobe said. He paused. "I'll come and get you, but you'll have to pay the price."

"I'll pay!" I cried.

"All right. Say, 'I'm a yellow-belly, and I give up in womanly defeat.'"

I was desperate and, with only a moment's hesitation, I cast my pride away and shouted out the words. "I'm a yellow belly, and I give up in

womanly defeat!"

A minute later, I heard Jobe crashing through the weeds. He came through the wall of grass to my right. "Come on," he said, laughing. I followed him to the barn.

That night, as I undressed for my bath, I discovered that the skin on my stomach, instead of being its normal peach/pink, had somehow turned a dark and rather bright yellow. I was baffled; I didn't know what had happened. Perhaps, I thought, I had accidentally touched some type of chemical dye. But the yellow color would not come off -- even after a full ten minutes of hard scrubbing.

I did not tell my parents about this, however, and a few days later the color simply faded away.

I had no other experiences for almost ten years.

I was a history major in college. Midterms were over and, after nearly a full two weeks of nonstop studying, I decided to accompany some new-found friends and some recently acquired acquaintances to a club in Long Beach to hear the Chico Hamilton Quintet, the current musical sensation among the college crowd. I sat there in my shades, rep tie in place, smoking my pipe and listening intently in the fashion of the day.

After the set, one of the others at our table, a student named Glen whom I barely knew, took a long, cool drag on his cigarette and looked up at the departing musicians. "Crap," he pronounced.

I could not believe what I'd just heard. "You're joking," I said.

He shook his head. "Highly overrated. The music was banal at best."

I was outraged! I could not believe we had heard the same group. "You know nothing about music," I said to him. "I refuse to discuss it with you."

Glen smiled a little. "And I suppose you're a music expert?" he asked, addressing his cigarette.

"I'm a music major," I lied.

And I was a music major.

As simple as that.

My whole life shifted as I spoke those words.

I remembered the myriad music courses I had taken and passed; I recalled names, faces and even particular expressions of piano teachers I had studied under. I knew details about people I had not even known existed minutes before. I knew what the band had just played, and why and how.

I looked around at my companions. Doug, Don and Justin, the three people at the table I knew best, were glaring at Glen. "That's right," they concurred. "He's a music major."

They were serious.

I did not know what was going on. I retained a full memory of my "previous life," yet I knew that it was no longer true. Perhaps it never had been. And I knew that whereas a few minutes ago I could have recited the names of all the battles of the Revolutionary War and the outcome of each but could not have played the piano to save my life, now the opposite was true.

I slept only fitfully that night. I woke up still a music major.

I decided to check my school transcripts to find out exactly what was going on. I went to the Office of Admissions and Records, got my files from the clerk and took them over to a booth to study. I opened up the folder and looked at the first page. The words typed there stunned me. I

was officially enrolled as a music major with an emphasis in piano composition. I had never taken more than an introductory history course.

This can't be happening, I thought. But I knew it was, and something in the back of my mind made me push on. I looked up; the records clerk had turned her head for a moment. "I am a history major," I said to the transcripts in front of me.

The music classes were gone.

And then I knew.

Of course, the first feeling was of power. Incredible, uncontrollable, unlimited power. I could be anything. Anyone. And I could change at will.

But that disappeared almost immediately and was replaced by the more penetrating feeling of fear. Could I control this power? If so, how? If not, why not? Would it eventually fade? Or would it get stronger? Did this power or curse or miracle change only me, or did it change my immediate surroundings, or did it change the entire world in which I lived? Could I alter history? What exactly were the implications, ramifications and all the other-cations of this? A million thoughts voiced themselves simultaneously in my mind.

A test, I thought. I need to test this out. I need to make sure this isn't some type of elaborate hoax or psychological mind game being played on me.

First, I tried thinking of a command. I am a giraffe, I told myself.

Nothing happened.

Well, that proved something. To affect a change, the statement had to be said aloud. I was about to speak the phrase, when I stopped myself. If I said, "I am a giraffe," and actually became one, it was quite possible that I would permanently remain that way. A giraffe cannot speak. I would not be able to say, "I am a human being," and change myself back.

The fear hit again; stronger, more potent. I began to sweat. I would have to be very careful about this. I would have to think before I spoke. If I did not consider all of the possibilities and potential side effects of each statement I made from now on, I could permanently alter my life. And not just for the better.

So instead of testing out my newfound proclivity then and there, I returned my transcripts to the clerk, mumbled a simple "Thank you," and hurriedly returned to my room. Once inside, I closed and locked the door and pulled all of the curtains. I left all the lights on. I wanted to see this.

I had a full-length mirror on the back of my closet door. Being something of a clothes horse, I had always considered such a mirror a necessity and would never have been without one. Now it really was a necessity. I opened the closet door, took off all my clothes and stood before the mirror. "I am fat," I said.

The change was not visible. That is to say, it did not occur in time. I was thin, then I was fat. I did not bloat up or suddenly gain weight or anything of the sort. In fact, I did not physically change. I did not change at all. Rather, reality changed. One second, I weighed my typical 145 pounds. That was a fact. The next second, the facts changed. I weighed nearly 300 pounds. This too was a fact.

And it altered the world.

I retained a full memory of my "real life," but I also had a new and completely different life -- my fat life. And the world corresponded to it.

I knew that I had always had a bit of a weight problem, but that, after my girlfriend died from leukemia, eating had become a compulsion, a neurosis, a serious problem. I had tried several diets since then, but nothing worked. Eating was a need. And I loved pistachio ice cream.

I looked in the mirror at my triple chins and my overflowing gut. I looked like nothing so much as a big ball of white dough. "I am thin," I said.

The world changed back. I was not fat. I had never had a girlfriend with leukemia. I hated pistachio ice cream.

This was a different reality.

That was as far as my "tests" or "experiments" went. I quit then and there. I did not understand this power, I did not know how to use it, I did not want to cope with it. And I was determined not to employ it for any reason. I vowed never to utter another sentence which contained the word "I."

But it is amazing how people adapt; how human beings have this sort of innate ability to adjust themselves to change, no matter how radical. People living next to chemical dump sites soon stop noticing the stench; people living on the beach soon cease to hear the endless crashing of the waves.

All this is rationalization. For I got used to the power rather quickly, though I kept my vow and abstained from its usage. The power became an accepted part of me. It became comfortable.

And it happened.

One day, having failed miserably on a final in one of my more important classes, sitting in my room, feeling depressed and sorry for myself, I thought, Why not? Why not use the power? Why not use it to get something I want out of life?

I planned my speech carefully. I did not want to screw this up. Finally, I had worked out what seemed a perfect statement for my purposes and was ready to say it. Once again, I stood before the mirror. "I graduated from Harvard with a PhD in political science, and I am now a presidential consultant," I said.

And it was all true. The knowledge of my previous life as a financially and academically struggling history major at USC during Eisenhower's administration was still there, but it was a memory of the past. I was a different person now -- establishing myself as one of the more brilliant minds in the popular Stevenson White House.

There was no transition period. I knew my job and was good at it. Everyone knew and accepted me. The transformation had gone perfectly.

The power was an annoyance in my everyday life, however. I would greet people with the customary, "I'm glad to see you," and would suddenly find myself overjoyed that they had stopped by. Or I would say to people, "I'm sorry you have to go," and, by the time they had finally departed, I would be near tears. On particularly frustrating days, I would mutter to myself, "I'm sick of this job," then, feeling the effects immediately, I would have to blurt out, "I love this job, it makes me feel good!"

But I could function. The power caused me no major problems.

Until June 5.

A particularly nasty and involved crisis had come up involving both Germany and the Soviet Union, and we were at an emergency cabinet meeting in the President's office, arguing over our course of action. The Secretary of Defense had suggested

that we "Bluff" our way out of the possible confrontation with a first-strike threat. "Hell, they're already afraid of us," he said. "They know we've dropped the bomb once, and they know we're not afraid to do it again."

A surprising number of cabinet members agreed with him.

"No," I argued. "A diplomatic solution is needed in this instance. Military threats would only aggravate the situation."

The Secretary smiled condescendingly. "Look," he said, "your theories may be fine in college classes, they may work in textbooks, but they don't work in real life. I've been around these matters for the past 26 years, most of my life, and I think I know something about them. You've been here a little over a year. I hardly think you're in a position to decide these things."

I was furious. "I may not have been here as long as you have, but I do possess something which you seem to lack -- common sense. Do you honestly think threats of a nuclear war are going to put an end to this crisis? Of course they won't. I know that and you know that. Furthermore, I believe that such actions would lead to a full-scale military confrontation. And none of us want that. We have to talk this out peacefully."

The arguments soon wound down and the President, looking tired and a little strained, thanked us for our contributions and went off to make his decision.

I was in my office when word came that the Soviets had launched an all-out nuclear attack. "Please file into the fallout shelter," a voice said through the speaker above my door. "Do not panic. Please file into the fallout shelter. This is not a test."

The realization hit me immediately. "I believe," I had said. "I know." The fate of the Secretary's plan, the country and, possibly, the entire world had been in my hands, and I had not known it. I had botched it horribly. The attack was a direct result of my statements.

I panicked. I was not sure that I could think fast enough to stop the impending death and destruction, and prevent the holocaust. But I knew that I had to save myself. That much was instinctive. "I'm a history major at USC trying to get financial aid from the Eisenhower administration," I screamed.

And I was on a couch in the financial aid office. A woman was staring at me, as if waiting for the answer to a question. I was sweating like a pig and shaking as if pained. I am not even sure I was coherent as I ran out the door and to my room.

But it was not my room. The same Impressionistic prints were on the walls and the same furniture was arranged in the same way, but the room was different. I was in room 212 instead of room 215.

This was not quite the same reality I'd started from.

Thus I learned that my statements could have delayed actions and unforeseen consequences. If I did not study in detail all the possible meanings of all of my words and/or did not phrase my sentences carefully, things could change beyond all reason. And once again, I grew afraid. Only this time the fear was deeper. This time it did not go away.

I made the decision. I would speak no more. I could not afford to gamble with the lives of other people, nor could I bear the responsibility

of changing reality, or, even, particular circumstances. I realized that even the most innocent comments, devoid of all malevolent intent or meaning, could wreak havoc I could not envision. I could not take the chance of "speaking ever again."

I had to leave school. That was my first move. It was impossible to live in a college environment without uttering a word, and I knew that the temptation would be too great for me. My friends would talk to me, teachers would ask me questions, acquaintances would stop and engage me in casual conversation. I had to leave.

I quickly gathered all my belongings together and packed what I needed. I took all of my money. I left.

Once on the street, however, I realized that I had no idea of what to do next. I did not even know where to start. Time, I thought, I need time to think, time to sort things out, time to formulate at least some semblance of a plan. I felt in my pockets and counted out all the money. One hundred dollars. That would buy me some time.

I did it all without saying a word. It's amazing, really, how well one can function without even the slightest form of verbal communication. I rented a small shack on the beach for a week and bought enough groceries to last me for that time without saying so much as a "yes" or a "no" to anyone. I got by with noncommittal grunts, quizzical looks, nods and various gestures.

And then I was ready.

I had already decided never to utter another word again. Now, I knew, I must enforce that vow. I had to wean myself from the world of people. I had to cut off all ties with humanity. I had to isolate myself from everything -- go cold turkey, as it were. And I had to do it in a week. In seven days, I had to reject and unlearn a lifetime of thought patterns, habits and behavior. I had to de-accurate myself.

It was hard at first. With the absence of human contact, I found myself wanting to think out loud. I felt, like the heroes in radio dramas, compelled to talk to myself.

But I overcame that compulsion. Soon, the urge disappeared altogether. I spent the days walking along the empty beach, occasionally swimming, and reading good books. I grew used to my solitude.

Nights, however, were a different matter.

The first night, I decided to turn in early. I drank a cup of espresso, marked my place in the book I was reading and settled down in the double bed.

I awoke in what had once been a shopping mall, now abandoned and inhabited by poor people, most of whom were wandering down the once-carpeted aisles of stores trying to hawk pieces of scrap metal they'd scavenged. A woman walked up to me and held out a rusted gear. "Want to buy it?" she whined pitifully. "Only a dollar."

I was completely baffled, trapped in that dazed and foggy netherworld between sleep and wakefulness. I did not know what was going on. I looked down at my body and got another rude shock. I was female.

Then it came to me. I remembered my warm comfortable bed in my rented beach shack. "I am back in my cabin on the beach," I blurted out. "I am the same person I was when I went to sleep last night."

And I was.

I must have been talking in my sleep. It was the only plausible explanation. No one had ever

mentioned it to me -- not my parents, my brother, nor any of my friends or roommates -- and perhaps it wasn't even audible, but apparently I was a sleepwalker. That was a problem. I could control my waking actions and my conscious thoughts, but sleep, dreams and my subconscious were beyond my reach.

The sleepwalking continued, and I was never sure whether I'd wake up in my own bed, wake up on some alien planet, or even if I would wake up at all. Sometimes, I would awaken in the middle of the night only to find myself in some surrealistic nightmare; in a world with no recognizable features and with the bizarre juxtaposition of unrelated objects so characteristic of dreamscapes. Once, I remember, I awoke in a wild west fort on a huge bed of ostrich feathers nearly twenty feet high. I was surrounded by soldiers. To my right, a storm was brewing over a barren plain. To my left stood a bright and shining, ultra-modern supermarket.

Although I never broke my vow of silence during the day, I constantly talked in my sleep, and then again when I awoke -- in order to return to the "real world."

Eventually, the problem did go away. Whether I willed myself to stop talking in my sleep or whether it disappeared of its own accord I don't know. All I know is that it took a long, long time.

I refuse to let myself think about the possibly reverberating effects my nighttime mumblings may have had.

When the week was up, I left my rented cabin.

I traveled. At first, I wanted to get as far away from people and civilization as I could. So I headed north, to the wilds of Canada and then on to Alaska, doing odd jobs here and there for my room and board, pretending to be mute. But I'm a city person. And I found that I missed the throngs of people and the hustle and bustle of city life. I wanted to be near the crowds, even if I could not be part of them. And, truth be told, it's just as easy to remain isolated and alone in a crowded city as it is in deserted country side. Cities are so impersonal and cold, and the people in them so alienated from each other, that I fit right in. I notice my lack of communication; I have to live with it, it is an unending constant in my life and it is torture to me. But to everyone else, I'm just another person. No one notices that I don't speak.

But this is all beside the point. This is all background information. This is all a preface to what I want to say.

I have given it a lot of thought. Over 20 years of thought. And I have decided to use the power one last time. I do this not out of selfishness or greed. I do this not for myself at all. And I do not enter into this rashly or without reason. I do this after careful consideration and deliberation, and with a definite goal in mind. I do this purposefully and with a clear conscience.

For over these past decades, I have come to realize the full implications of this ability. I understand the tremendous, almost supreme and absolute power which I wield in my fallible and mortal body. It is a terrible thing to live with day in and day out; a terrible burden and responsibility. I cannot and should not be entrusted with such capabilities. Nor should any man.

I do not know if there are others with this power. Perhaps, even as I write, whole realities are coming and going, shifting and changing all



around me. But no more. I intend to put a stop to it. I intend to make sure that no human being shall ever have to live through the hell which I have experienced.

Tonight I will speak. And the power will cease to exist.

I have thought this through, as I've said, for many years, and I believe I have honed down, defined and clarified my statement to such an exact degree that it will have no effect other than the one which I intend. I have even written it down, to make sure I make no mistakes.

Of course, it is impossible to know exactly what all the consequences of my words may be. The laws of nature and science may crack and break; the world itself may change utterly. But I am willing to take that risk. I must take that risk.

In the process, I too, along with my power

and along with any other individuals who have this ability, will cease to exist. It is for the best. My senile ravings, once I grow old, will now never be able to affect anyone; the cries of my death will not cause chaos. Instead, I will simply de-exist. I will probably never have existed at all. The people I once knew will not retain even a faint memory of me.

This, then, is my record, my proof. I have written down the events as they have transpired and have attempted to explain, somewhat, the full implications of my power. If I am successful in what I intend, the power will disappear forever; it will never trouble mankind again. If I am not successful...who knows? I can only try. And I am willing to chance it.

Wish me luck.

---

danger on the sunburn limited

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the train slips through the night  
like a needle sliding into a vein.  
each light from a cell of order  
breaks the clean slate of darkness.

inside the dining car miranda thinks,  
between pieces of buttered lobster,  
about the conversations that scarred  
her face with streams of mascara

she remembers jealous accusations,  
the litany of suspicious movements  
for the past few weeks, past few months.  
her waiter bends elegantly from the waist,

her waiter bends from a great height.  
miranda had been watching herself, as well,  
despite the price of endangered mirrors.  
at times she is forced to look deeper

that the surface balance, as far down  
as her memory of two old women,  
two mothers and two sisters, rocking  
in the shade of a tiny front porch.

that memory's hanging in miranda  
like earrings dangle from her skin.  
miranda's convinced the past is just  
an obscure shade of the cosmetic arts.

after dinner, after the stares of male diners,  
miranda strolls the moving corridors  
like an architect through a maze  
she has designed and now must test.

miranda, in danger of discovery,  
could meet herself at any time  
and not recognize the figure gazing  
back with the look of a puzzled stranger.

--AJ Wright



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# I Created A Little God

by W. R. Lennertz

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I CREATED A little god, making him from common household items. For his head, I used a plastic milk carton dated Sept. 17. For his body, I took a small bucket and connected empty paper towel rolls for his arms. I worked three days to make his paper bag tuxedo and his shoe box bowler. All in all, he was a very dapper god with beautiful red yarn hair and construction paper features. He smiled over my household, giving me a warm satisfied feeling.

I created a little shrine, putting my god on it, surrounding him with gifts. I gave him a digital watch, a six pack of Cherry Coke, baseball cards from my childhood, including Sandy Koufax, Bill Mazerowski and the Washington Senators team, and my copy of Atlas Shrugged. His red paper smile approved. He wanted only the best things, superior products. The shrine had little blinking Christmas lights and a sign that read: Here's the Beef!

I created a little name, Abboo Moe. And I created a little set of holy laws. I didn't need ten of them. I didn't need a big book filled with tissue paper pages that numbered in the thousands. I only needed three rules; Abboo Moe only needed three.

Abboo Moe was a god of possessions, physical fitness, dogs, and dental hygiene. His laws reflected his preferences.

The first law: Abboo Moe had to receive a daily gift from his follower. It must be placed on his shrine and delivered with the following prayer:

Abboo! Abboo!  
Abboo Moe!  
Abboo! Abboo!  
You do...  
me well!

The second law: Abboo Moe demanded I walk my dog daily. Not only did my dog get a work-out but so did my body. Abboo Moe didn't want me to pay doctors because I had fat in my arteries. He didn't want me to die. He liked my gifts.

The third law: Abboo Moe demanded daily brushing and flossing of my teeth. He wanted nice gifts and would rather have me spend money on gifts than on a root canal.

These rules worked beautifully. Every morning I would awake early, dress, brush and floss my teeth and walk the dog. I spent the rest of my day as I had before. I went to work at my espresso shop, The Little Bit. At the end of the day, I would come home, make dinner and perform a material sacrifice. I'd select a household item or one I'd bought especially for Abboo Moe. I would go to the shrine, place the item on it and say:

Abboo! Abboo!  
Abboo Moe!  
Abboo! Abboo!  
You do...  
me well!

At such moments, Abboo's expression seemed to change. His construction paper features seemed to form a kind, contented look for his one and only faithful follower. Looking on his face brought a joy difficult to describe, a euphoria beyond the senses, a warm inner feeling of self fulfillment. I felt one with Abboo Moe, my house, and the rest of the world.

In the next two months, I noticed the shrine's size increasing. Its books, houseplants, knick-knacks and small appliances bulged out of the shrine, taking up more than a third of the living room.

I had just started remodeling The Little Bit and was working long, hard hours. I worked the regular store hours and stayed to supervise the construction. Sometimes I would get home as late as midnight. I diligently kept Abboo Moe's three laws, until one morning I got up late and rushed to the store, forgetting my walk. I even neglected to brush and floss my teeth. At noon, I remembered, knowing I would have to somehow redeem myself in the eyes of my little god. When I came home at eleven, I brought three beautiful shells from the curio shop next door to The Little Bit. I placed them on the shrine and looked at Abboo Moe.

He didn't look pleased. His features seemed solemn and withdrawn. It scared me. I had to explain and did. He still didn't seem his usual self.

Abboo! Abboo!  
Abboo Moe!  
Abboo! Abboo!  
You do...  
me well!

"I hope these three conch shell from Micronesia can make up for my grave mistake. I beg your forgiveness. Please Abboo, please..."

His expression didn't change. I turned off the light and headed for bed.

The next three days, I managed to rise early, walk the dog and brush and floss my teeth. At night, I returned with small gifts for Abboo Moe. He seemed to smile again and I felt happy. Then I got sick.

The flu hit me. I felt awful and began purging everything in my system. I lay in bed, trying to think. I managed to call my cousin, Leon, to work the shop. Hanging up the phone, I felt

asleep. I stumbled to the bathroom a few times in the next twenty-four hours. Other than that, I was unconscious.

I awoke with my face three inches from the dog's. He rested his head on the edge of the bed. Guilt hit me. I had been asleep for the entire day. The dog was not only hungry but unwalked. He hadn't been walked yesterday or today. I hadn't brushed or flossed either. Abou Moe did not receive his gifts! I jumped out of bed, naked and shivering. I grabbed my jewelry box and ran down the hall. I paused at the living room entrance and looked at the shrine. In the middle of the mass of shrine gifts, elevated on a two foot wooden platform was the little god, Abou Moe.

He glared at me, accusing me of blasphemy. His paper eyes seemed the intense red of his yarn hair. The mouth scowled. He looked as if he would grab the Swiss army knife at his feet and attack me, severing my head as a sacrifice.

I dropped to my knees on the cold floor and held the jewelry box above my nude body. Closing my eyes, I waited patiently while the god of my life and house passed judgement.

Abou! Abou!  
Abou Moe!  
Abou! Abou!  
You do...  
me well!

"Please forgive your humble servant. I have been sick and unable to attend to my affairs. Please accept my most valuable possessions."

I placed the box at the edge of the shrine and looked at Abou Moe. His hatred was enormous. I knew he would never forgive me. He wanted my life, my house, and The Little Bit before he would be satisfied. It was he or I. Keeping my eyes fixed on Abou Moe, I waded through the presents surrounding the shrine, tripping over occasional potted plants, six packs, records, books and appliances.

"You scum! This is the thanks I get for my faith in you!"

I grabbed the little twerp by the neck and ripped off his milk carton head. I picked up his bucket body by the lapels of his paper bag tuxedo.

Stumbling back across the gifts, I stubbed my toe on a toaster oven and fell. His head bounced out of my hand, rolled over some books and came to a rest against a briefcase. I struggled to rise, feeling the blood leaking out of my scraped hip. I glared at his laughing head. He had drawn blood and knew it. Stretching my arms in front of me, I grabbed the head and mashed it into the ground. Its eyes and nose came off, but still it smiled. I managed to crawl over the gifts, feeling them dig like teeth into my flesh. I was in pain but wouldn't stop until I finished with Abou Moe.

I made it to the window. I opened it and threw the little body into the trash can below. Bringing the head to eye level, I counted to three and smashed my fist into it. The plastic broke, cutting my hand. Blood smeared on translucent plastic. I threw the head into the trash can, slammed the window shut and collapsed.

The next week was spent trying to get my life back in order. I slept in late, didn't feel like walking the dog and brushed my teeth half-heartedly. Slowly, I cleaned the living room, throwing out articles that reminded me of Abou Moe and making a stack of things to sell at my upcoming garage sale. I had just thrown the three conch shells from Micronesia in the trash when I heard a knock at the door.

It was a large woman with a large smile. She blinked three times and asked if I had ever thought about the Afterlife. She offered to give me a copy of Watchtower magazine.

"You really should consider the Afterlife. You should look into our religion."

"Religion?" I said closing the door, "I never think about it."

#### UNHOUSED

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Doors are portals to your fears  
and so you hide  
from doors and sky,

until they subdivide  
to drive a freeway through you.

Walls and floors and ceilings  
now rubble at your feet  
leave you empty  
in the empty street:  
crying in the ruins,  
digging in the ruins,  
ruined in the ruins.

Until you finally find  
a hiding place  
deep, so deep inside  
the ruins of your mind.

-- DLSproule

# The "New" V. C. Andrews

by Gretta M. Anderson

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Finally the prequel to *FLOWERS IN THE ATTIC* is out. *GARDEN OF SHADOWS* is the newest of the Doppelganger family suspense/ horror novels, released in November 1987, ISBN 0-671-64257-X. The publisher is Pocket Books.

Since the death of V. C. Andrews in December 1986, I had personally wondered if the story of the roots of the terror in *FLOWERS IN THE ATTIC* would be told. Now through the notes Virginia Andrews left when she died, prolific horror novelist Andrew Neiderman is taking up where Virginia left off at her untimely death. According to the December 1987 issue of *Locust*, Mr. Neiderman has contracted to finish ten partial books started by V. C. Andrews, the pages being provided by her mother with whom she had lived.

*FLOWERS IN THE ATTIC* is a terrifying book about four children - Christopher, Cathy, Cory and Carrie Doppelganger - who are locked in the attic of their grandparents' mansion. They are believed by the grandmother and butler John Amos to be the devil's spawn. Their widowed mother Corinne is trying to get back in the good graces of her father, as so not to lose her inheritance.

The succeeding books, *PETALS IN THE WIND*, *IF THERE BE THORNS*, and *SEEDS OF YESTERDAY* are equally hard-hitting novels, about the three surviving children obtaining their goals, and revenge. But *GARDEN OF SHADOWS* goes back to where it all began: with the grandparents, Malcolm Neal Foxworth and his wife, Olivia Winfield Foxworth.

The novel starts out like this: "Addendum to the last will and testament of Olivia Winfield Foxworth. To be opened twenty years after my death."

Olivia Winfield is a tall, gawky woman, who feels she finally found her place in society and life by meeting and marrying the handsome Malcolm. But Malcolm is obsessed by his mother, who left his father when he was five. He has married a plain, proper woman, who he is certain will not leave him, because she is not beautiful and attractive to other men, like his mother had been.

But the real secret is contained in the "Swan Room," Malcolm's mother's bedroom. Olivia is warned upon her arrival at Foxworth Hall that she can do whatever she wants in regard to the running of the house, but not to enter the Swan Room. Of course, this makes her curious. When she does investigate the Swan Room, she is caught by her husband. She finds out about Malcolm's hate and obsession with his mother, and is raped, her first sexual experience.

Later, Malcolm's father Garland returns from several years abroad with a new bride, Alicia. Alicia is enchanted with Swan Room, and decides she would like that room as her boudoir. After Garland's death (murder?) Alicia is also raped by Malcolm, and becomes pregnant. After the child is born, Alicia leaves, giving the child to Malcolm.

Olivia then takes her husband's child as her own. Corinne is a beautiful child, and her father can't do enough for her.

Several years pass, and the children - Olivia and Malcolm's two sons and Corinne (who, by the way, is named after Malcolm's mother) grow up. Alicia and Garland also have a son. Upon Alicia's death, her son Christopher returns to Foxworth Hall. Corinne, like her two half-brothers believe Christopher is their uncle. But after the death of her two brothers, she falls in love with her uncle.

Olivia's life from the day she married has been one tragic event after another. Though her husband doesn't love her, she became the matriarch of Foxworth Hall, making sure the household is run right. Malcolm constantly belittles their sons, accusing Olivia of raising them up to be sissies. All his love is for Corinne. A confused, warped love. And Olivia has no recourse, she turns to God for her strength and comfort. Her cousin, John Amos, a former bible-thumping, fire-and-brimstone type preacher is probably as evil as Malcolm as he convinces her she must stop "the lineage of sin." Thus the story goes on in *FLOWERS IN THE ATTIC*.

The first fifty pages move along slowly, merely laying the groundwork of the story. From there on, the story builds, makes you ask "why was this allowed to happen?" or "why didn't she leave?" *GARDEN OF SHADOWS* takes place in the early-to-middle part of the 20th century, when divorce was practically unheard of, and women, considered marriage to be sanctimonious. Olivia had a heavy load to carry.

The death of Virginia Andrews was a great loss to those of us who enjoyed her writing. I think, now seeing what Andrew Neiderman did with *GARDEN OF SHADOWS*, we may get to see and enjoy what Virginia didn't have time to complete.

I look forward to the next Andrews/Neiderman collaboration.



# New Books

by Irwin Chapman

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**NOONSPELL** by J. N. Williamson. Leisure Books, 1987, ISBN 0-8439-2556-6, \$3.95.

**J. N. WILLIAMSON READS.** It's evident from such well-researched Williamson novels as **THE HOUNGAN**, **THE TULPA**, **THE LONGEST NIGHT**, **PREMONITION**, and **PLAYMATES** that Williamson must have perused every major book on paranormal phenomenon published in English during the past hundred years. Not just fiction, mind you, but all those staid academic texts as well.

What draws one to J. N. Williamson novels is, besides exciting and well-constructed fiction, the plethora of factual information contained therein.

**NOONSPELL** is no exception. Williamson's latest terror tale has a firm footing in psychological and parapsychological fact. And then Williamson takes the reader one step farther and pulls the reality rug out from underneath the reader's feet.

One always wonders when reading a Williamson opus whether the evil is real -- objective and independent -- or merely a creation of the suffering psyches of his characters. Is this really *The Supernatural* at work? Or is it only imagination run wild?

Masterfully, Williamson keeps those doubts alive in the minds of his characters -- and thus his readers' minds -- and one hopes -- prays! -- that, in the end, evil'll turn out to be no more than a nightmare.

Take, for instance, these thoughts from the mind of Grady Calhoun, *Noonspell's* beleaguered protagonist: "He didn't have magical powers, Grady struggled to convince himself...The bastard was only psychotic, but it made no sense to 'accelerate' his murderous plans." But those murderous plans do accelerate. And nothing can possibly stop this incredible evil but Grady -- Grady realizing that evil is indeed real; and Grady acting on this new-found knowledge in a last-ditch desperate attempt to save his remaining loved ones and himself, too. Does he do it? Heh heh. Read the book. Ole Chapman ain't gonna spoil it fer ya by spilling all the beans!

All the occult sciences -- astrology, reincarnation, voodoo, premonition, astral projection, predilection -- come together masterfully in Williamson's novel. *Noonspell* is a masterful mix of occult elements woven into a brilliant tapestry. *Noonspell* is a good read.

**COME THIRTEEN** by David Silva. Leisure Books, 1988, ISBN 0-8439-2569-8, \$3.95.

THERE'S SOME MIGHTY FINE writing to be found in Dave Silva's second novel.

Silva, editor of *The Horror Show* magazine and author of *CHILD OF DARKNESS*, has developed a unique style that's quickly making him a big name in

the horror field. He's one of the most sensitive writers around, and it's evident in this new work. **COME THIRTEEN** is a minor masterpiece.

Unlike *CHILD OF DARKNESS* where a first novelist worked through his flaws in search of his voice, **COME THIRTEEN** shows us a maturing writer who's comfortably in control of his medium. Not completely. Not yet. But enough so the novel works well on several levels and leaves us hungering for more.

If we're lucky, Silva will continue the sympathetic and believable characters he developed in **COME THIRTEEN** in at least a dozen sequels. Todd Foster, just turned thirteen, is the kind of lonely young boy who has great potential (literally and figuratively) to affect the world. Stephen Watts, 27 and a free-lance artist, is at a crossroads when his actions can affect not only the world, but his free-lance soul. Carol Lambert, mother of Todd's best-friend Jimmy, is a tortured soul who yearns for the child she carried to term but lost in delivery and can't believe is really dead. And there's Desiree and Beelzebub and...

And...the Knack!

The Knack is Todd's unique ability to move mountains, to perceive emotions, to predict catastrophe, to...

I want to tell! It's such a great plot that I want to let the cat out of the bag and tell you what happens next!

Get thee behind me, Satan!

OK. Whew.

I won't tell any more.

But I gotta quote this passage from page 281 of **COME THIRTEEN**: "Boundaries, whether of the mind or the body, of the spirit or the will, are self-imposed limitations freely accepted by you... Believe in your limitations and they will bind you to physical laws that are comfortable and safe, but are in fact untrue. There is nothing more you can learn from me that is as important."

Thanks, Dave. There's nothing more I can tell readers about your book that is as important.

I recommend **COME THIRTEEN**. And I look forward to its sequels.





# REAL TIME™

**From Ike Keen:** Well, Halloween is over and winter has set in here in the Ozarks. Your last issue of 2AM was, as the kids say, awesome! The artwork was especially good, the stories excellent.

**From J. N. Williamson:** Irwin was marvelous!

**From Francis J. Matozzo:** Just finished the Winter issue of 2AM and thought it an appropriate time to congratulate you on the wonderful development of your magazine. The stories are consistently good, the columns interesting and the art-work and graphics are truly first-rate. I'm sure your success with 2AM will continue into the future.

**From John E. Ames:** Just a brief word of thanks for the entertainment and information 2AM has provided me through this past year. Solid fiction was contributed by Elizabeth Engstrom, Billie Sue Mosiman, Colleen Drippé, Kevin Burk, and Mark-Christopher Mitera, among others. And I especially appreciated the columns, including "Real Time." I learn things about the field of dark fantasy, pick up a little gossip, get a chance to compare my opinions with other readers and moviegoers.

I do have the usual little gripes and bitches. For example, I'd like to see even more fiction and the "cutting edge" of horror, rather than so many clever renditions of the usual themes. Also proofreading could be a tad sharper -- usually I notice only petty typos, but sometimes it's more serious. This was true in #5: Heather Svedbeck's "One Special, Perfect Way" and John Borkowski's ill make for a fine team. But the glaring omission of the opening letter 'G' confuses the reader (What the hell is ultt?) [Well... what can I say? It's a proofreading mistake I caught the day we picked up the magazine from the printer. As you can tell in #6, I changed

things so that particular mistake won't happen again. ed.]

Overall, though, 2AM has evolved into a sharp-looking, comprehensive publication with plenty to offer horror fans, including some lovely digressions such as the on-going debate on censorship. Thanks to you and your writers and illustrators!

**From Heather Svedbeck:** I was thrilled with seeing "One Special, Perfect Way" in 2AM. You did a great job proofing it, and I like the illustration a lot, too...

**From John Roseman:** (In reply to subscription renewal letter:) I want to continue the dream.

P. S. "You'll never find 2AM at your corner supermarket or drugstore"? Why not? And why limit your dream? A fine magazine like 2AM deserves to be anywhere, even if it presently looks infeasible. The way I see it, if I can find THE HORROR SHOW at B. Dalton, I can find 2AM too. (Eventually this is the dream. But currently you cannot find 2AM at your corner drugstore or the B. Dalton. No limits to the dream; never is the wrong word. ed.)

**From Simon MacCulloch:** Congratulations on the continuing quality and deserved success of 2AM.

Your forthcoming projects sound intriguing and I wish your every success with all you have planned for '88.

**NEXT TIME:** Summer Fiction Issue. Fiction by Clinton Lawrence, Chris Markham, Paul Olson, Russell Roberts, Richard Taylor and Roger Dale Trexler. Poetry by David Kopaska-Merkel, Michael McClellan, Marthayn Pelegrimas and Wayne Allen Sallee. And much, much more!

